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SUMMER 1994

EDITOR'S PAGE

Mitchell Cohen
307

POLITICS ABROAD

Joanne Barkan on the new Italian politics, **309** • *John Torpey* on Italy's secessionists, **311** • *Gerard Braunthal* on the German Social Democrats and the "Super Elections," **315** • *Hirofumi Uzawa* on the roots of scandal in Japan, **319**

ARTICLES

What Future for Social Policy?
323–345

Welfare Reform: A History Lesson
Linda Gordon
323

Public-Service Privatization:
Ideology or Economics?
Elliott D. Sclar
329

Urban Poverty and Defensive Localism
Margaret Weir
337

Not Pornography!
Ruth Rosen
343

F. A. Hayek: Dogmatic Skeptic
David Miller
346

Politics at the Opera
Mitchell Cohen
354

Blacks, Jews, and Farrakhan
Julius Lester
365

THE QUESTION

Eugene D. Genovese asks the North American left, "What did you know, and when did you know it?" about the crimes of communism, **371** • Responses from *Mitchell Cohen*, **377** • *Eric Foner*, **379** • *Robin D. G. Kelley*, **380** • *Alice Kessler-Harris*, **381** • *Christine Stansell*, **383** • *Sean Wilentz*, **384** • Concluding comments, *Eugene D. Genovese*, **386**

Environmental Activism and Global Civil Society
Paul Wapner
389

Incomplete Modernity:
Ulrich Beck's "Risk Society"
Michael Rustin
394

MAGAZINES

James B. Rule on environmentalist magazines, **401**

CARTOON

Edward Koren goes to *Dissent*'s 40th anniversary celebration, **403**

ARGUMENTS

H. Brand, Joanne Barkan, and *Richard Rothstein* debate immigration policy, **404**

NOTEBOOK

James B. Rule on who reads *Dissent*, **413**

BOOKS

Christopher Hitchens on *Mencken: A Biography*, by Fred Hobson, **415** • *William Kornblum* on *American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass*, by Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, **420** • *Mark Levinson* on *The Misunderstood Economy: What Counts and How to Count It*, by Robert Eisner, **423** • *George Packer* on the novels of Toni Morrison, **426**

LETTERS

430

THE LAST PAGE

Michael Walzer
432

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Editor's Page

A little over a year ago, at a briefing at NATO headquarters in Brussels, I heard an American colonel, in quick succession, acclaim the organization's new dialogue with ex-Warsaw Pact generals, argue for the continuation of NATO funding despite the end of the cold war, and, finally, explain why the organization should not intervene in Bosnia. Tito's defense strategy, he said, rested on expectation of a Soviet invasion; every nook and cranny of Yugoslavia had been turned into an arms depot so that a guerrilla war could be sustained for some two years without foreign help.

A weighty point, one that, combined with the long history of Balkan ethnic conflict and an American's memory of Vietnam, ought to temper advocacy of engagement there. Still I queried, perhaps displaying military naïveté or a hapless gut sympathy for minorities left to slaughter, how can it be that after billions of dollars and decades of NATO preparations for apocalyptic battle, prowess vanishes entirely when it comes to genocide? Surely NATO planned for contingencies—like a Soviet move into Yugoslavia? No, I was told, NATO was a defensive alliance.

A year and thousands of corpses later, one looks back with the greatest dismay at the ignoble behavior of the West and the UN in the Bosnian carnage. Uneasiness grows as murderous news multiplies—Rwanda, Haiti, elsewhere. It is not just a matter of violence; one million people died of malaria in Africa last year. One is tempted to holler: *something must be done*! Then one surmises that much of the world expects the U.S. to do it—whatever "it" is.

Here, of course, is where nervousness sets in; Americans are torn between dreadful images from abroad on the evening news and the knowledge that deep problems afflict us at home. This issue of *Dissent* devotes particular attention to thorny questions of social policy. Linda Gordon examines the long-term consequences of how welfare has been conceived, emphasizing the deleterious repercussions of allowing for two classes of social citizenship. Elliott Sclar then dissects the right-wing myth that privatization cures all social ills. Margaret Weir exposes what happens when attempts to reduce federal domestic spending combine saddling local governments with increasingly difficult social responsibilities, opposing cities to suburbs, and inflaming racial tensions.

How can domestic malaise be confronted seriously if resources are stretched across oceans and Americans are world police? The question is appropriate, but also deceptive, because America's integration into the global economy and the country's status as the sole superpower make isolationism a dangerous chimera. And there is a moral problem: we cannot simply turn away when ghastly events occur elsewhere—unless our model is Neville Chamberlain discoursing on "faraway countries about which we know nothing."

If the United States is to address its domestic woes, it will have to reimagine its international role. Those, like Robert Dole, who shriek demagogically that American troops in multilateral peacekeeping or peacemaking efforts can only be commanded by Americans, had best realize that if the United States does not want to be world cop, an international force must be formed in which we share (but are not always the principal bearer of) burdens. This issue of *Dissent* wrestles especially with domestic concerns; such global dilemmas will come to the fore in our Fall issue, in which we will present a major symposium on American foreign policy.

—M.C. □

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Joanne Barkan

THE NEW ITALIAN POLITICS

From the mid-1960s to 1980, the piazzas belonged to the left in Italy. So did the bookstores, since dominant culture—criticism, political science, philosophy, the arts—leaned heavily to the left. Conservatives despaired: Oh, when would Italy become a normal West European nation, more satisfied with capitalism and less overrun by would-be revolutionaries?

Everyone thought the 1980s answered this question. The workers' movement declined, the left (dominated by the huge Communist party) fragmented further, Yuppie culture prospered, and the bookstores no longer stockpiled radical texts.

But "normalcy" turned out to be a slippery phenomenon. Today Italy stands out again—the first West European country since the Second World War to accept neo-Fascists as government ministers, the first to award the position of prime minister to a business tycoon (Silvio Berlusconi) who has never before held public office, and the first to condone the triumph of what Italians call *telecrazia*—the domination (or creation) of politics by television. Perhaps there's one more "first," which subsumes the others: Italians are the first citizens of a postwar European democracy to vote into office a coalition of parties with questionable links to liberal democratic institutions.

Any effort to understand how this happened should begin with this point: the right managed to snatch the banners of honesty, efficiency, and radical change away from the left. For most of the postwar period, these watchwords belonged to the Italian Communists, who were excluded from national power but ran successful, often innovative, local and regional governments. The rare comrade caught with fingers in the cookie jar was summarily expelled.

In recent years, however, some Italians came to associate the now former Communists (they regrouped as the Democratic Party of the Left in 1991) with the corrupt national regime. The reasons were many, albeit sometimes vague or unjustified: the leftists had been around for so long, they compromised with the national government in order to get reforms passed, they didn't produce new charismatic leaders, a small number were implicated (but not proven guilty) in corruption scandals, they advocated continuing the old government's economic policies.

Equally important, Italians—unlike the Americans, British, and others—had not yet experimented with a Thatcherite free market. The state still controlled about 40 percent of Italy's economy and ran it badly. The public-sector bureaucracy produced a third-rate welfare system. The politicians in charge of it all—Christian Democrats and Socialists at the top of the list—made their operating principles patronage and bribery. The situation was primed for a Reaganoid knight promising to smash government shackles and liberate the millionaire in each individual.

Then the *ancien régime* imploded. An ever-expanding series of kickback investigations, begun in 1992, implicated some six thousand businesspeople and politicians, including one-third of Parliament. The ensuing crisis followed a twentieth-century rule of thumb: when a state is rocked to its core, when a ruling elite falls apart, when politics becomes polarized, right-wing populism exerts the strongest pull.

All this helps to explain why Italians in March 1994 looked to the right for honesty,

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efficiency, and something new. But why Berlusconi? A creature of the old system, he built an empire on bent laws and protected markets and is now between $2.3 and $4 billion in debt. Why the neo-Fascists, who are offspring of an even older and literally murderous system?

The first right-wing group to win big by attacking the regime for corruption was actually the Northern League. The League fashioned its call for renewal around the powerful theme of regional separatism and anti-Southern sentiment and had great success in the North. But southerners and those who preferred their right-wing politics without tinges of racism needed a different vehicle. The League ended up paving the way for its own competition, for a smoother right-wing force with immense resources and nationwide appeal. Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* fit the bill.

Italians adored Berlusconi long before they had a chance to vote for him. Berlusconi used the system, but he never got caught. Millions of Italians didn't see him as corrupt; he seemed so enterprising, so bold, so successful, so rich, so . . . let's admit it . . . *Americano*.

Berlusconi had the resources to set up twelve thousand *Forza Italia* clubs along the lines of the soccer clubs that support his champion team. But his most potent asset was his monopoly of commercial television (he owns all three private stations in Italy, which capture 50 percent of all viewing audiences). Saturating the peninsula with ads, interviews, and what was supposed to pass as reportage, Berlusconi built a mighty political machine in a matter of weeks.

L'Espresso magazine (March 11, 1994) reported the following: from February 2 to February 25, which was the period immediately preceding the official campaign, the evening news programs on Berlusconi's television stations quoted then Prime Minister Carlo Ciampi 27 times; they quoted Berlusconi 408 times.

The legitimation of the neo-Fascists required a longer, more subtle process. After almost fifty years, the rhetoric of the armed resistance against Fascism and the songs of liberation bring tears to the eyes of a smaller proportion of the population. For most voters in their twenties, the Fascist period has become grandparents' history. Moreover, the resistance and militant anti-Fascism have always been more closely associated with the left in Italy—and young Italians aren't leaning left. In March, 34.4 percent of all voters selected the progressive alliance, and 42.9 percent chose the rightist alliance. Among voters under twenty-five, only 26.6 percent opted for the progressives while 50.7 percent chose the right. (The center was consistently low.)

Berlusconi understood that the new election law favored large alliances, and he found the perfect campaign partners: the League in the North and the neo-Fascists in the South. No matter that the three parties disagreed on key issues—federalism, privatization, taxes, and the welfare state; they waltzed around their differences. The eight members of the progressive alliance didn't do as well. They bickered over nominations and made some major gaffes (Achille Occhetto of the Democratic Party of the Left traveled to Brussels to calm the NATO brass; meanwhile, his ally, the secretary of Communist Refounding, called for Italy to withdraw from NATO).

Berlusconi didn't have a solid program, but he managed to sell miracles ("a million new jobs and lower taxes"). The right alliance won 366 of 630 seats in the Chamber of Deputies; the progressives won 213; and the centrists only 46. In the Senate, the right fell just two seats short of an absolute majority.

Eight weeks after the election, everyone knows what to worry about: Will Berlusconi separate his business interests from his government responsibilities? Will the right govern honestly, or will it reinvent organized corruption? Will the right-wing coalition hold together? If it collapses, will a government crisis put intolerable pressure on democratic institutions? Did the election demonstrate popular sentiment for a more authoritarian government? How will workers, unions, and poor people fare?

At present, it sounds alarmist to dwell on the old conundrum, What happens when a majority votes freely to limit democracy? Italy's integration into the European Union provides some

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guarantees. Better to think of the two hundred thousand Italians who gathered in the pouring rain in Milan's Piazza del Duomo on April 25 to commemorate the liberation from Fascism and Nazism. Achille Occhetto remarked to a reporter that the resistance "allowed there to be a right, a center, and a left, which is what Fascism *didn't* allow." So be it. □

John Torpey

AFFLUENT SECESSIONISTS: ITALY'S NORTHERN LEAGUE

In the national elections held in Italy in late March that ushered in a "Second Republic," the *enfant terrible* of Italian politics over the last several years, the Northern League, won only 8.4 percent of the national vote. Yet as a result of the concentration of that vote in the northern part of the country and of new electoral arrangements intended to break the hold of the country's entrenched "partyocracy," the League secured slightly more than one-sixth of the seats in the lower house of the new Parliament. It thus has veto power in the right-wing coalition with Silvio Berlusconi's *Forza Italia* and the neo-Fascist National Alliance that won a clear legislative majority in March. The League has variously been described in the U.S. press as "separatist," "racist," and "anti-immigrant," and has even been likened to the National Front in France and to German neo-Nazis. What is the Northern League and what do its supporters want?

The Northern League was officially formed in late 1989—less than two weeks after the fall of the Berlin Wall, in fact—as an amalgamation of several already existing regional movements. Of these, the Lombard League under the leadership of Umberto Bossi was the largest and most significant. Bossi, now fifty-two, is a Lombard who had failed at medical school and virtually everything else he tried before getting involved in regional politics in the late 1970s and early 1980s. He commands a fervent following among League loyalists, who view him with some reason as a political tactician of remarkable intuition and acuity. The "mother of all Leagues" was the *Liga Veneta*, which entered its first election in 1979, but Bossi suppressed its more folklorist emphases in favor of the diatribe against Rome that has become his trademark. Bossi is not especially interested in folklore, but he has talked about separating the North from the rest of the country—or at least about instituting a federalism that would grant substantial autonomy to three "macroregions" of the North, Center, and South—as a solution to "northern" grievances.

The Northern League's official banners portray an armor-clad warrior holding a raised sword in one hand and a shield in the other. The insignia is intended to evoke the original twelfth-century Lombard League, which wrested considerable autonomy for several northern city-states from Barbarossa, the Holy Roman Emperor. Rome is Bossi's Babylon because, as he never tires of inveighing, in the course of postwar Italian political development it had been laid siege by politicians of both the left and the right who soaked the state for the

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benefit of their party comrades. Because the North produced something like 70 percent of the GNP with only 15 percent of the Italian population, Bossi loudly insisted that Lombards and other northerners were being robbed by the clique at the center of power. One of the League's favorite images is of a cow named "Lombardy" being milked by the party bureaucrats in Rome.

The revolt against Rome and the parties that controlled it for more than forty years, especially the Christian Democrats (DC) and Socialists (PSI), caught considerable fire in the North after the collapse of the cold war. In part, this was because people who disliked communists no longer had to hold their noses and vote DC once the "communist threat" had subsided. But the League also reflects changes in the social structure of the Italian North. It represents a social group that has been generated by economic developments over the last two decades or so that has never before had political representation: small and medium-sized entrepreneurs. As the economy contracted and the costs of corruption grew more difficult to bear in the late 1980s, entrepreneurs outside the structures of the large private and state-owned industries began clamoring in the mid-1980s for a new kind of politics consistent with their needs. The Northern League stood for rationalization in Max Weber's sense: the separation of official from private life, the creation of an efficient, law-abiding corps of state bureaucrats, and the reduction of state-imposed barriers to entrepreneurial activity. The League's leading intellectual figure, Milan-based constitutional theorist Gianfranco Miglio, has frequently stressed northern Italy's historic ties to Austria, with its tradition of efficient state administration, and the baneful legacy of Bourbon laxity in the South.

But the League's vigorous assault on the "crooks in Rome" resonated well beyond the ranks of the new entrepreneurs. The emergence in early 1992 of the "Bribe City" (*Tangentopoli*) scandals and the subsequent "Clean Hands" (*Mani Pulite*) investigations only confirmed everyone's assumption that political corruption was pervasive in Italy (See "Italy: Corruption Metastasized," by Joanne Barkan, Summer 1993 *Dissent*). An extraordinary transformation had begun, including striking indications of disenchantment with the Mafia in Sicily, where it is generally regarded as firmly woven into the fabric of daily life. By the time of the last national elections in 1992, the League won 23 percent of the votes in the North, establishing itself as the most powerful political force in the region.

Yet the League's shield has been stained by a kind of original sin. As a regional party hostile to Rome's efforts to develop the South (denounced by the League as *assistenzialismo* and symbolized above all by the "Fund for the Mezzogiorno"), its conception was, in the minds of non-northerners, anything but immaculate. Having dropped much of the separatist rhetoric in favor of "federalism," the League set its sights on Rome. In order to gain a voice in Rome, however, it needed allies in the 1994 election. The best it could find was Berlusconi, the media magnate whose shaky empire was built with considerable assistance from Bettino Craxi, the Socialist party leader recently put on trial for corruption. In part because many rank-and-file *leghisti* regarded this alliance as a betrayal, Bossi excoriated Berlusconi as a creature of the discredited past during the final weeks of the election campaign. Meanwhile, Bossi would have no part of Berlusconi's ally to the far right, the neo-Fascist National Alliance (formerly the Italian Social Movement or MSI). The National Alliance wants a strong central state, which is anathema to Bossi, and it has raised irredentist claims to parts of Slovenia, an issue that has had no place in the League's rhetoric. Despite its regionalist origins, the Northern League lacks the traditional sense of ethnic grievance that would undergird irredentist enthusiasms. At bottom, the rise of the League can be attributed to the fact that the economic and political "core" areas of the country are disjunct; the League seeks to right this disparity by bringing the two together—by acquiring greater autonomy for the North.

The political success of the Northern League has resulted largely from the perception that it offers a bold departure from the corrupt ways of the postwar Italian "partyocracy." Yet the League is also one of many contemporary

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regional autonomy movements. Beyond its contribution to the shakeup of party politics in Italy, the League's larger significance lies in its talk of pulling "Northerners" away from the rest of the Italian state in order to exercise greater control over their "own" affairs. The League has re-opened the "national question" in Italy on terms that resonate far beyond the Italian peninsula.

The Northern League's drive for enhanced regional autonomy reveals yet again the ambiguities of that troublesome Enlightenment ideal, "self-determination." The notion of self-determination entered modern political discourse as the rallying cry of the oppressed in revolt against outmoded autocracies. Its aspirations were democratic. The point was to bring to a head the looming historical showdown over the choice: kings or people. The idea of self-determination retained these democratic aims through the revolutions of 1848, serving as the justification for subject nationalities to confront their imperial rulers. After the "springtime of nations" had passed, however, self-determination—and its twin, nationalism—began to assume uglier, more selfish overtones, reflecting an opposition between ethnos and demos. The desire for self-determination has been fraught with contradiction ever since. Everyone applauded when the East Germans defied their communist masters in 1989 with the claim, "*We* are the people." Doubts surfaced quickly, however, when they shouted to the West Germans, "We are *one* people."

The growing perception of the nation-state's waning efficacy has done little to still enthusiasm for the founding of new states designed to fulfill aspirations for "self-determination." Typically, the drive for autonomy emerges from the feeling that one's group is oppressed for reasons of ethnic, cultural, or linguistic differences relative to the group that dominates the state. Most of the republics that left the Soviet Union once it decided not to force them to stay fall into this category. The collapse of the Soviet and Yugoslav federations largely along ethnic lines, and the military conflict these processes have provoked, have heightened fears that the world is headed into a seething maelstrom of ethnic hatreds. In response to this global upsurge of identity politics, conservative political scientist Samuel Huntington has drawn up a map of the post–cold war world that emphasizes fissures of culture—Western, Islamic, Hindu, and so on—as the main fault lines of the new world disorder.

Yet insistence on the ethnic and cultural dimensions of conflict within and between states diverts our attention from the possible economic sources of nationalist, irredentist, and secessionist strivings. In economic terms, regions may desire a divorce from the dominant state, or at least a slackening of ties with it, for two quite distinct reasons. First, breakaway territories may perceive that the center's discriminatory treatment is the cause of their relative *backwardness*. Among recent secessionist movements rooted in complaints that their region's relative economic underdevelopment is a product of the character of relations with the central state, the cases of Slovakia, Scotland, and Québec stand out. Each of these instances of "national" conflict, of course, also contains a more or less sharply defined ethnic component. Nonetheless, proponents of greater autonomy in each of these regions have argued that they would do better economically if given more control over their own affairs. Ethnocultural concerns were by no means the only ones involved.

In contrast to these examples, relatively *advantaged* regions may object that they have been mistreated because they generate a larger proportionate share of the social product and have been wronged by state redistribution schemes. In Slovenia, Latvia, Estonia, and Catalonia, the spread of secessionist sentiments sprang in substantial part from the belief that the central state had been sucking the lifeblood of their economically more vital area. But in each of these cases, the ethnonationalist component of the secessionist drive—rooted in a sense of the historical injustice attending the region's incorporation into the larger state union—has been quite pronounced. Perhaps only in the case of Slovenia did the economic grievances against the central state outweigh considerations of ethnicity and nationality. This aspect of Slovenia's departure from Yugoslavia is consistent with the fact that it joined the

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South Slav federation voluntarily after World War I. The Slovenians thus had less cause to develop the enmity toward the center long nurtured in Catalonia and the Baltic states. Still, of course, the Slovenes had plenty of historical reasons to view themselves as ethnically distinct from the rest of Yugoslavia.

The rise of the Northern League in Italian politics throws the importance of the economic aspects of regional autonomy movements into high relief. Alone among comparable movements, the League has had no serious recourse to ethnic identity, linguistic distinctiveness, cultural variation, or minority status in its efforts to loosen the grip of the Italian state—or, more precisely, the League had little success as long as it defined itself primarily in these terms. While the images of the South and of southerners held by the League's activists are undeniably negative, the massive migration of southerners to the North during Italy's postwar economic boom years renders implausible the notion of distinctive *ethnic* identities in North and South. Instead, the League has advanced politically by castigating the profligacy of a central state dominated by southerners that recycles tax revenues toward a south, or *Mezzogiorno*, rendered corrupt and inefficient by this government "assistancism." In short, the Italian South is to the Northern League what welfare mothers are to American conservatives.

In keeping with the "tax revolt" aspect of its identity, the League has complained that the North contributes more to the state budget than it receives in return. By one estimate, indeed, the province of Lombardy—the heartland of the League's support—contributes 25 percent of national revenues and gets back only 18 percent of government disbursements. But a number of League supporters that I spoke to recently also indicated that they were most troubled not by the low *quantity* of services, but by their poor *quality*. Their solution to these problems was to call for a federalism that would both give them greater control over their own resources and force the South to "stand on its own two feet."

The Northern League's striving for autonomy thus reverses the usual relationship between culture and economics at the heart of minority feelings of maltreatment. Rather than seeing ethnic or national identity as the cause of discrimination by the dominant society, the League takes alleged discrimination in the form of its disproportionately high contribution to the national budget as the basis for invoking an "ethnic" identity—that of "northern Italians." Culture, usually the *aqua vitae* of group identification, takes a decided back seat to economics in the preoccupations of the Northern League and its supporters.

In other words, the League has sought to create a quasi-ethnic identity around the core assertion that its potential adherents are more productive and useful than those elsewhere in the country. To the hard-core *leghisti*, northerners are good because they are wealthier and more valuable to society, while southerners are bad because they are economic losers. The Northern League thus seeks to create a nation not of *victims* but of *victors*. The losers in Italian social development, the League suggests, are simply no longer "our" responsibility: they must learn to fend for themselves.

The implications of this attitude are obviously disturbing for anyone concerned about social equality. For these views are by no means confined to the Italian North, even if they appear there in a particularly crystalline and geographically compact form. Given the lack of any sharply defined ethnocultural basis for its antipathy toward the South, the Northern League's push to absolve itself of the burdens of an economically laggard *Mezzogiorno* recalls Staten Island's recent vote to secede from New York City. Each of these cases represents a territorially specific version of the withdrawal by relatively affluent groups from inherited conceptions of the commonweal. Those seeking greater autonomy view the larger entity from which they wish to disentangle themselves as a drain and a drag, both economically and metaphorically. Until now, this outlook has generally taken the shape of the "tax revolt," a movement that found its starkest recent expression in California's Proposition 13 movement nearly two decades ago. The parallel between the Northern League and Proposition 13 suggests that the "secession of the affluent"

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need not take exclusively territorial forms. It has been expressed in this way in Italy simply because the affluent happen to inhabit a particular region of the country.

Spurred on in the late 1980s by the obvious failings of the Italian partyocracy, the Northern League has contested the legitimacy of the common political life instituted in Italy at the time of unification some 130 years ago. At the same time, it has rejected the obligation toward a shared well-being that is implicit in the idea of national belonging. By doing so primarily for economic reasons rather than because of ethnocultural differences, the Northern League represents a notable departure that may tell us much about the character of political and social conflict in the years to come—both in Italy and beyond. □

Gerard Braunthal

THE GERMAN SOCIAL DEMOCRATS IN A "SUPER ELECTION YEAR"

Many conservatives and neoliberals claim that now that Soviet-style communism is extinct, social democracy (or democratic socialism) will soon meet the same fate. Then, of course, they assert that capitalism has triumphed. Are their claims premature, at least as far as social democracy in Germany is concerned? Does the sharp turn of the Social Democratic party of Germany (SPD) to pragmatism in this "Super Election Year" 1994, in which twenty local, state, national, and European Parliament elections are scheduled, signify that the party has given up its vision of a muted social democratic future that conservatives and neoliberals do not share?

A survey of the SPD in contemporary Germany should be able to provide some answers. As the senior party in power from 1969 to 1982, under chancellors Willy Brandt and Helmut Schmidt, its progressive domestic agenda did have a limited success. This was especially true in the Brandt era, when numerous reforms produced improvements in social welfare, pensions, co-determination in industry, education, and environmental protection; moderate income redistribution; and a better quality of life in the cities. These incremental changes may be considered steps toward a more social democratic future.

However, reform efforts had limitations: first, the SPD could not settle intraparty dissension on some major policies and rejected system-transcending radical proposals from the Young Socialists (the *"Jusos"*). Second, the liberal Free Democratic party (FDP), the junior member in the SPD-led coalition governments, blocked a number of SPD recommendations. Third, the government's reform efforts were stymied by mounting fiscal problems.

Since 1982, the SPD, having become the chief opposition party to coalition governments led by Helmut Kohl and composed of the conservative Christian Democratic Union/Christian Social Union (CDU/CSU) and the FDP, frequently produced alternative policy proposals, most of them more progressive than those of the government, on pressing political, economic, social, environmental, and foreign policy issues. Yet this opposition strategy, including critiques of the government during

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Bundestag question hours, conceals the amount of cooperation or consensus on numerous bills (for example, pensions and health), which the parties have not publicized in order to maintain their own profiles. No one could have predicted in 1982 that after German unification in 1990 key constitutional issues, such as political asylum, the deployment of German troops outside of the NATO perimeter, and constitutional revision, requiring two-thirds parliamentary support, would arise. These issues drew the SPD into the government's decision-making process. The two-thirds requirement leads to a blurring of differences between parties, which must compromise if legislation is to be approved.

The SPD was unable to gain enough votes in the 1983, 1987, and 1990 elections to displace Kohl. It nominated prominent figures for chancellor but waged some of its campaigns on the wrong issues. The SPD was often seen by voters as less competent than Kohl's coalition to deal with key problems. It also lost support among floating voters and youth, many of whom voted for the Greens or opted out of politics.

The SPD has undergone numerous leadership changes since 1987, when Brandt resigned as chairman. Hans-Jochen Vogel, a former justice minister, led the party until 1991, and then made way for the younger Björn Engholm, minister-president (governor) of the *Land* (state) of Schleswig-Holstein. In May 1993, Engholm resigned after admitting that he had lied to an investigative commission established in 1987 to probe a CDU election scandal. After a brief period, Rudolf Scharping, the forty-five-year-old minister-president of Rhineland Palatinate since 1991, emerged as the new party leader. He first gained a plurality among SPD members in an unprecedented referendum of candidates for the post, designed to enhance internal party democracy, and then was formally elected at a party convention in June 1993. Although lacking the colorful personality of some of his rivals, Scharping is liked for his diligence, honesty, and unassuming provincial manners. Politically close to the center/right of the party, he is primarily a pragmatist and not an ideologue.

Party Problems

In 1994, Scharping and his colleagues face a number of intraparty and external problems. There has been increasing popular revulsion toward all establishment parties, the SPD included, because of scandals, a failure to solve major problems, and a lack of openness and honesty. As a consequence, the number of nonvoters and voters without strong party loyalties has increased steadily. There is much talk of a crisis in the party system as a whole as new splinter parties arise, especially in the middle and right of the political spectrum.

One result: the SPD and the other parties are losing members. In 1993 alone, SPD membership dropped from 886,000 to less than 865,000. Although from a U.S. perspective the latter membership figure is still impressive, for the SPD, which had more than one million members in 1976, the trend is quite disturbing. In recent years the party hoped to increase its membership in Eastern Germany, especially in Saxony and Thuringia, where its strength was concentrated before 1933. Instead, the party has been lucky to hold on to most of its twenty-five thousand members. The SPD seems unable to attract East German youth into its ranks because most are apolitical or gravitate toward the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the successor party to the communists. Moreover, most citizens, tired of past organizational and party memberships, are too busy coping with the present to join any party.

In addition, SPD leaders have been unable to build up an effective organization in the former German Democratic Republic (GDR). A small group of pastors and other dissidents founded the party there in October 1989 and several months later received financial and other support from the West German SPD. In the 1990 elections, the East German SPD fared poorly. It received support primarily from well-educated, middle-class urban voters, including left intellectuals, but not from blue-collar workers who had been satiated by decades of "real socialism" and who were eager to increase their standard of living, as promised by the CDU. In September 1990, the East and West German SPD organizations

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merged. Since then East German SPD leaders have received representation in all the top organs. However, few East German Social Democrats have become well known and some have been beset by controversies, including accusations of having worked for the Stasi, the communist secret police.

In the national headquarters in Bonn, SPD officials decided to assist financially the buildup of the party in the East by imposing a special tax on all SPD members. Many members in Western Germany, lacking solidarity with their colleagues in the East, quit the party in protest. East German members in turn were displeased when some West German leaders tried to run their organization or took political positions deemed prejudicial to the interests of East Germans. To illustrate: in 1993, Oskar Lafontaine, minister-president of the Saarland (in the West), proposed that, in order to slow down national budget deficits, wages and pensions in the East should not be raised to West German levels as quickly as had been suggested earlier. Manfred Stolpe, minister-president of Bradenburg (in the East), took issue with him and warned Bonn SPD chiefs that such a position would harm the party in the 1994 elections.

SPD leaders know that the buildup of the organization in the East must be a high priority if the party is to gain more electoral support than in 1990. Most likely a new type of SPD organization will develop in the East without mass membership on the Western model. Odds are that the SPD will gain considerable backing from Eastern voters who are dissatisfied with Kohl's policies.

The Party Program

Anticipating a year of elections, left and right factions in the SPD have muted their differences on key domestic and foreign policy issues, generally backing the leadership's policy recommendations at the November 1993 national convention in Wiesbaden. In keynote speeches, Scharping and Lafontaine (the latter serves as the party's spokesperson on economic and financial questions) dealt primarily with ways in which an SPD-led government would make improvements in employment, the economy, finances, and the social welfare system. SPD proposals include tax increases on the wealthy; cuts in state expenditures, including subsidies and welfare programs; and a meshing of the state budget with improvements in the economy, which in turn must be linked to increases in productivity. Only then, so runs the argument, can the economy become more competitive with that of other countries and can unemployment be reduced. Thus the SPD will not push for the Keynesian solution—launching state-financed and state-run employment programs to fight the current massive unemployment of four million persons—because state indebtedness will climb, in its view, to unacceptable levels.

At the convention, Scharping, aware of the more conservative national climate, was intent on steering the party into the political center. Despite discomfort on the left, he reasoned that the party had no chance of unseating Kohl in 1994 unless it abandoned its attempt to win over Green voters on its left flank (they compose a smaller core than the centrist voters), and abandoned Keynesian solutions. Scharping also reasoned that the party had to make ideological retreats on controversial domestic policies, such as political asylum, on which the party had already made important concessions to the CDU/CSU, and on civil liberties, in which the CDU/CSU has normally taken a tougher law-and-order stance than the SPD. He convinced a slim majority of convention delegates to support—although with some stipulations—a bill by the Kohl government that would allow security agencies to eavesdrop in apartments where criminal activities are suspected. On energy, Scharping postponed discussion of the future party course on a proposed higher tax to conserve fuel, which in the past produced much debate within and outside the party.

At Wiesbaden, Scharping also relegated disputed foreign policy planks to the sidelines, knowing that to emphasize them would produce damaging debates. Nonetheless he won support, after years of intraparty discussion, for his proposal that German troops be allowed to participate in United Nations peacekeeping

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operations, provided that they would not be involved in combat.

The SPD domestic and foreign policy proposals show that the party's differences with the CDU/CSU have narrowed considerably, although the SPD does stand to the left of the CDU/CSU in maintaining its commitment to expanding social justice and siding with the growing underclass in both parts of Germany.

Prospects for SPD Rule

Scharping may have to pay a price in his determined drive to win the national election. A majority of the shrinking number of blue-collar workers, the traditional bloc of SPD supporters, can be expected to vote for the party in the October election. However, as in the period from 1969 to 1982 when the SPD was in power, an SPD-led government, if installed, is bound on occasion to take different positions than the German Trade Union Federation (DGB) officials, most of whom are Social Democrats. Government and unions can be expected to disagree on how best to combat the continuing recession. In the past year, Scharping told DGB officials that German economic competitiveness requires lower labor costs. An SPD-led government, in collective bargaining negotiations with public employees, probably will support demands for a shorter work week in order to decrease unemployment and save jobs, but only with commensurate cuts in pay or fringe benefits. Such a position has already been taken by a few SPD minister-presidents despite protests by organized labor.

Should the SPD win the election, Scharping, as chancellor, might have some freedom to move the party back to the moderate left in social and civil liberties issues, if he were so inclined. But this will not happen in economic and financial policies as long as Germany's economy is in recession. An SPD-led government, which would need the support of the conservative business community, with whose leaders Scharping has held numerous talks, will seek to revive the German economy within the constraints of a global market.

Government policies will also depend on the SPD's choice of coalition partner. Of course, party leaders will not make a decision until after the elections. Prior commitments might lose votes among those who would disapprove of one coalition partner or another. Polls in early 1994 showed the SPD gaining between 38 to 41 percent of the vote; the CDU/CSU, 32 to 37 percent; the Alliance 90/Greens (the new amalgamation of West and East German Greens and the progressive "Alliance 90"), 9 percent; and the FDP, 6 percent. The right-wing Republicans most likely will not receive the necessary 5 percent minimum for Bundestag seats but the PDS may gain a few direct seats in the districts. (The German electoral system mixes proportional representation and single-member constituencies.)

The SPD is expected to make a strong showing in October because of the mounting dissatisfaction with the Kohl government's economic record. Voters in Western Germany are tired of huge budget deficits, high unemployment, and the costs of rebuilding the East German economy. Voters in the East feel betrayed by Kohl's promises that unification would bring the benefits of capitalism at little cost. Polls show that a majority of respondents view the SPD as the party most qualified to deal with the economic crisis and Scharping as the most qualified candidate.

Should the SPD gain a plurality of votes and should the Alliance 90/Greens muster enough support to produce a Bundestag majority for both parties in coalition, there could be an unprecedented national "red-green" government. The leaders of the Greens are in favor but some SPD officials doubt whether such a government could span the differences between the two parties on several major issues. Still, most SPD leaders, on the left and in the center, expect such a coalition to work out any important difficulties. It would introduce progressive legislation in at least the environmental and social fields, gender equality included, which would be a welcome alternative to the traditionalism of the CDU/CSU-FDP programs. As a consequence, voters in future elections may again find themselves with a more meaningful choice between two blocs of parties than is the case at first glance in 1994.

The SPD could also form a three-party

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coalition with the Alliance 90/Greens and the FDP, but that might be more unstable than a two-party alliance. A third possibility is a grand coalition with the CDU/CSU, which most SPD leaders reject for ideological reasons and for fear that it would leave all parliamentary opposition in the hands of minor parties.

No matter what government emerges, the SPD has gained in stature and prestige in the past year. Two decades ago Austrian chancellor Bruno Kreisky declared that the "strength of social democracy in Europe and the world depends to a great extent on how strong social democracy is in Germany." His statement still holds true. This fall the SPD may well emerge victorious. Conservative and neo-liberal claims of social democratic demise are premature. □

Hirofumi Uzawa

A LETTER FROM TOKYO

In the July 1993 elections, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) lost its majority in the House of Representatives for the first time since its founding in 1955. Japan found itself with a new government composed of a previously unimaginable seven-party coalition—parties ranging from the ultraconservative Shinsei-to (Renaissance) and the quasi-religious Komei-to to the once dogmatic Socialists. This constellation was possible solely because of the desire to establish a non-LDP government. Morihiro Hosokawa, an obscure leader of the Japan New Party, was chosen as prime minister.

Hosokawa, a neophyte in national politics who championed change, emphasized the need to rid the Japanese political system of the influence of the scandal-ridden LDP. On entering office, his approval ratings soared beyond that of any previous premier. But in eight short months he made one political blunder after another, some with grave consequences. Particularly important was the transgression of normal parliamentary procedures to push electoral "reform" through the Diet (Parliament). And while he came into office as a protagonist of honesty, he was forced to resign this past April because of a scandal. His successor, Tsutomu Hata, was his foreign minister and leader of Shinsei-to.

The electoral reforms establish a modified single-member district system. Many claim that this will enhance Japanese democracy, but the most likely outcome will be political dominance by two parties whose political philosophies and organizational structures differ little from the bankrupt LDP. The Socialists and other parties are likely to be decimated in future polling, and major political and policy decisions will, consequently, be the result not of open democratic discourse in the Diet but of backroom deals between the parties and the powerful, arrogant state bureaucracy—all of which have long characterized Japan's politics.

One of the salient features of the country's political system throughout the last forty years has been the intimate collaboration between the LDP and the bureaucracy to create a milieu favorable to the interests of big business, frequently at the expense of social justice and public welfare. This has had deleterious consequences for professional discipline and the integrity of virtually all social institutions, including, of course, the bureaucracy itself.

Each government ministry is a powerful organizational entity, with a well-demarcated

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domain of control and regulation. Career bureaucrats retire relatively young, going to work either in the big businesses they had previously supervised or in the public corporations previously under their jurisdiction. The LDP, generally, was instrumental in funding the latter. Concurrently, big businesses donated, legally or otherwise, large sums of money annually to the LDP, which, in turn, collaborated with career bureaucrats in catering to the interests of big business.

The heavy concentration of power in the "troika" of the LDP, the bureaucracy, and big business spurred the Japanese economy. At the same time, the distribution of wealth and income became entirely skewed. The divergence between the economic performance of Japanese industries and the living standards of ordinary people widened steadily. This was not altered by the collapse of LDP hegemony, and the choice first of Hosokawa and now of Hata will only draw Japan further into a political quagmire.

It isn't easy for outsiders to understand the internal workings of the Japanese political world. A book published in December 1993 by a senior LDP politician described candidly how major decisions were made in the past. In his national best-seller, *Nine Politicians Who Corrupted Japan*, Koichi Hamada detailed a number of incidents, some possibly of a criminal nature, and named the political figures involved, occasionally adding slanderous remarks. Hamada repeatedly challenged the LDP leadership to subpoena him before the Disciplinary Committee of the Diet so that he could testify under oath as to the veracity of his charges. No legal action has yet been initiated.

The LDP's structure, Hamada suggests, can be likened to the popular image of the Mafia in America. When young, he was himself a member of one of the largest of the more than two thousand *yakuza* "families" (*yakuza* means gangster in colloquial Japanese; it is popularly believed to be derived from "8-9-3"—a worthless roll of the dice). However, he was persuaded by the family don that he was too much of a coward for *yakuza* life and that he should pursue instead a career in politics. He rose in the LDP, serving as chairman of the powerful Ways and Means Committee in the House of Representatives.

The LDP was founded as a grand coalition of all the conservative parties in postwar Japan. Its ostensible purpose was "safeguarding Japan from the threat of communism and socialism." Each constituent group retained organizational and pecuniary independence within the LDP, becoming a "faction," or more appropriately, a family. None of them had a specific political orientation; rather, each was bound together by personal fealties.

The chairman of the LDP was chosen from the bosses of the families. Since the LDP was assured a comfortable majority in the House of Representatives, its chairman automatically became premier thanks to these "kingmakers." Thus the election of the chairman became an occasion when rivalry between the families was most keen and conspicuous, and huge amounts of money were reportedly passed among them. In his book, Hamada describes in detail how successive prime ministers were chosen, from the legendary Kakuei Tanaka (premier in the early 1970s) to Kiichi Miyazawa, the last LDP premier. For the last twenty years or so, the largest family in the LDP was Tanaka's. After his conviction in the Lockheed Scandal, his successors—except for Noboru Takeshita—were chosen from other families, although Tanaka played a decisive role in the decisions.

The circumstances in which Takeshita followed Nakasone as prime minister in 1987 reveal much about the LDP and its relationships with some ultranationalist *yakuza* families. Takeshita had just become a family boss by usurping power from Tanaka and undoing his family. Ultranationalist *yakuza* with close ties to Tanaka launched a boisterous campaign accusing Takeshita of "patricide." It is alleged that Nakasone refused to nominate Takeshita as his successor unless the latter proved himself capable of "controlling" the ultranationalist *yakuza*. Takeshita then paid a "pious" visit to Tanaka's home. After being refused entry, he bowed deeply in front of the

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main gate. Remarkably, the activities of the *yakuza* ended; Takeshita was made prime minister.

Two years later, however, Takeshita was forced to resign due to a scandal. Shin Kanemaru replaced him as family boss, but Takeshita refused to quit the scene, and rivalry between them led eventually to the breakdown of their family, an important development in the eventual demise of the LDP hegemony. As chief of the largest LDP family, Kanemaru played a pivotal role in selecting prime ministers. His protege Ichiro Ozawa apparently designated Kiichi Miyazawa for the top job. But in 1992 it was Kanemaru's turn to be enmeshed in scandal; he was accused of accepting a large illegal payment from a *yakuza*-related trucking firm. It was alleged that Ozawa then contracted the attorney general to guarantee that his mentor would only have to pay a minor fine. Nonetheless, public outcry forced Kanemaru's resignation from the Diet.

In the ensuing reshuffle of his cabinet, Miyazawa was able, for the first time, to make appointments without the dictates of Kanemaru and Ozawa. He appointed a fiercely independent minister of justice who promptly had Kanemaru arrested on charges of tax evasion and other offenses. But Miyazawa had committed a major sin in the *yakuza* world, for he owed the premiership to Kanemaru (via Ozawa) and had betrayed his benefactor. Ozawa and other Kanemaru lieutenants never forgave him.

Ozawa was probably the most articulate, resourceful, and Machiavellian politician in the LDP and, at one time or another, occupied all major party posts except the chairmanship. His best-selling book, *Blueprint for a New Japan*, articulates a fiercely conservative and occasionally ultranationalist political philosophy. Reading him, one gets the feeling that in his heart are aspirations to restore the glories of imperial Japan. The title he chose for his book is identical to one chosen some sixty years ago by Ikki Kita, a fanatical militarist, who inspired young, frustrated Army officers to the abortive coup d'état that led Japan irrevocably down the path to World War II.

Ozawa's grand scheme included restructuring the electoral system along British lines, with small constituencies. His concern was less the merit of the system than how such change would reshape the Japanese political constellation. Two political forces, the Socialist party and Komei-to, had been potential threats to the LDP. Komei-to's political philosophy is almost identical to the LDP's. The Socialists were long dominated by rigid ideologues, but they were also the more formidable opposition, occasionally coming close to toppling the LDP in the past. The electoral reform would almost annihilate them while Komei-to would most likely be absorbed into the LDP.

For reasons known only to himself, Miyazwa strongly committed himself to reform. But in June 1993 the bill was voted down in the Diet, placing Miyazawa in political jeopardy. Ozawa, despite his own advocacy of reform, called for a vote of no confidence, which was passed by an astounding majority. Kanemaru was avenged; new elections were called. Ozawa immediately led his cronies out of the LDP to form Shinsei-to. His pretext was that he was fed up with a party that was so corrupt that it turned down the reforms he had advocated. Suddenly, a plethora of "reform" parties had emerged that had broken from the LDP. Hosokawa's Japan New Party had been founded the previous year by ex-LDPers, and another group soon formed the "Harbinger party."

In the elections the Socialist party suffered astounding losses—losing roughly half its seats—while the three splinter parties ran far better than expected. But no party won a majority. Ozawa was able to convince the three LDP-splinters, together with the Socialist party, Komei-to, and other small groups to form a non-LDP coalition government. Ozawa chose Hosokawa as its head, even though the Socialists, with 70 seats, had the largest single Diet delegation.

It has been rumored that large sums of money were funneled into Shinsei-to at its founding and during the election. Hamada says it came from the leadership of Soka-gakkai (the "Value-Creation Society"), a powerful religious organization, originally a branch of a fanatical Buddhist sect. Komei-to was—but is

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no longer—a political arm of Soka-gakkai. (Its activities, however, still draw substantial resources from the latter.) Hamada's book alleges that Ozawa talked Soka-gakkai's leader into supporting a broad restructuring of Japanese politics on the basis of a fusion of Komei-to and the LDP splinters. There was also a persistent rumor that Ozawa talked Makoto Tanabe, then head of the Socialists, into dumping the radical left of the party together with many genuinely reform-minded younger members (almost all of them were defeated in the last election).

As premier, Hosokawa, aided by Ozawa, rammed "reform" through the Diet. When its measures become effective, the Socialist party is likely to be further reduced in size; at a minimum, its small cadre of conscientious reformers will disappear altogether from the scene. The probable result: two parties dominating the political world. One will be a new party fashioned by Ozawa in association with Komei-to, backed by Soka-gakkai and seeking to lure disaffected LDPers. The other will be what is left of the LDP. Under this new constellation, the troika system will be reinforced, and the state bureaucracy will probably become more assertive and decisive—especially so with no countervailing forces in the Diet. A recent incident illustrates what may be on the agenda.

A few days after the reform passed the Diet, Hosokawa called a press conference in the middle of the night to announce a substantial income-tax reduction together with the introduction of a "National Welfare Tax" (a sales tax of 7 percent, replacing the current consumption tax of 3 percent). It turns out that this was actually Ozawa's initiative, in collusion with the deputy minister of finance. Nobody in the cabinet or the Diet was informed. Socialist ministers protested, an angry public outcry ensued, and a few days later Hosokawa nonchalantly called another press conference and withdrew the proposals. Throughout the episode, there was a disconcerting absence of criticism from the press, perhaps indicating how much its professionalism has been compromised by four decades of the troika system. If the Socialist party had been ineffective, the tax measures would have been adopted with almost complete disregard of democratic procedures.

That Hosokawa is now out of the picture doesn't change matters much. The scandal that forced his resignation was, in terms of scale, roughly comparable to Whitewater, but Ozawa deemed the prime minister's effectiveness to be finished, and asked him to quit. Ozawa also wanted to dump the Socialists and other moderates from the "reform" government. With this in mind he sought to lure from the LDP, with a promise of the premiership, Michio Watanabe, a former foreign minister who is boss of the most conservative LDP clan and a perennial aspirant to the top post. When Watanabe couldn't deliver the necessary parliamentary defections to compensate for the eviction of the Socialists and the others, Ozawa turned to Tsutomu Hata, a trusted confederate from the days when both men were in the old Tanaka family. For all practical purposes, the Socialists were kept out of the loop, and they soon quit the government.

Japan's political world now gravitates around the "Ozawa Coalition" and the teetering LDP, both with staunchly conservative politics and behavioral characteristics of the *yakuza*. With the future of the Socialists so uncertain there are no effective countervailing democratic forces either in Parliament or in the society at large, and the troika system will be reinforced. Japan is sinking into a political quagmire, and although the times and circumstances are obviously very different, there is an odor reminiscent of the prewar years. □

In Memoriam

We mourn the death of our colleague and friend Alec Nove, one of the leading political economists of the democratic left.

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What Future for Social Policy?

Linda Gordon

WELFARE REFORM: A HISTORY LESSON

When people say "welfare" today, they mostly refer to AFDC, the program for single parents and their children. These single parents are mostly mothers, of course, and the current vilification of welfare recipients and their "dependency" is directed primarily at women. The definition of the welfare problem is thus feminized, although this is not always acknowledged. Take the concern about teenage pregnancy as an example: the propaganda and the proposed solutions might lead someone who didn't know better to assume that these were immaculate conceptions because only the mothers are discussed. Indeed, early drafts of the Clinton administration's welfare reform proposal cite teen pregnancy as creating the very need for welfare—as if by remaining chaste or using birth control these girls could end poverty in the United States.

A bit of history may help us understand how we reached the political impasse characterized by such foolish—and sexist—thinking. Virtually all the "welfare" we have today comes from the Social Security Act of 1935. The public assistance programs it created have been denounced for decades, from virtually every political perspective. Today's calls for reform, and the Clinton promise to end welfare-as-we-know-it, arise predominantly from conservative impulses, but liberals and welfare clients of all political orientations are equally critical of the system. This remarkable consensus can be explained by the mistakes and defects of that legislation as well as more recent economic changes—because Social Security was inadequate even when it was passed.

Social Security has fed, clothed, housed, and reassured many millions of Americans. It excluded other millions. Some of those left out were brought under the umbrella in subsequent amendments, but usually in second-class programs. Those who, for example, most need old-age and unemployment compensation—that is, those least likely to get private pensions and most likely to be laid off—are excluded. The problems created by Social Security, however, are embedded not only in its exclusions but even in its inclusions. Social Security set up a stratified, inequitable welfare system, operating along several tracks, particularly along gender but also along racial and class lines. Popular language expresses and perpetuates that stratification. Today "Social Security" means old-age insurance—but that program is just one of eleven titles in the Social Security Act, which also established Aid to Dependent Children (today known as AFDC), old-age assistance (today known as SSI), various programs of aid to the disabled, and unemployment compensation. Each had different terms, each was aimed at different social groups.

The New Deal system of social citizenship created first- and second-class citizens. These invidious distinctions were drawn along a number of axes:

• Social Security excluded most minorities and many white women from superior pro-

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grams such as old-age insurance and unemployment compensation. It excluded domestic servants and agricultural workers, by far the largest categories of employment among blacks and Hispanics at the time. Eligibility requirements for unemployment compensation left out most seasonal and casual workers, employees of small firms, and other categories particularly common among women and minority men. These were not accidental omissions. They were concessions to conservative (particularly southern) congressional leaders that the Roosevelt administration deemed necessary to get the act passed. These powerful southern Democrats would not support a program that provided aid for sharecroppers, farm wage laborers, or domestic servants—a program that might threaten such workers' willingness to accept the abysmally low wages they were paid. These exclusions reflected, equally, some unarticulated 1930s assumptions about who were the citizens a welfare state aimed to support. White women were not considered regular workers or employees; minority men and women were by no means full citizens and were only just entering jobs in the core of the industrial/commercial economy.

• Social Security forced single mothers* and minorities into stingy, personally invasive, and stigmatized programs. The Social Security Act authorized federal contributions to older local programs of public assistance (traditionally called "poor relief") designed to cover those not able to benefit from the superior programs. These included Aid to Dependent Children and Old Age Assistance, and they were structured completely differently. They were means-tested, requiring applicants to divest themselves of resources (even non-liquid assets such as homes) and to submit to repeated searches for moral turpitude and financial cheating. By contrast, an Old Age Insurance recipient could be a millionaire, a drug addict, a child molester without losing his pension, and could spend his money on anything he chose.

• Social Security then offered some housewives—wives of covered men—a second-class set of old-age-pension entitlements through their husbands.

• Social Security's unemployment compensation plan originally included a public-works program that automatically kicked in whenever unemployment reached a dangerous level; this was eliminated from the bill.

• The temporary, emergency public works substituted for a permanent program were heavily weighted toward male labor. Works Project Administration (WPA) projects were mainly in heavy construction (dams, bridges, roads), while the smaller number of women admitted to the public jobs programs were concentrated in lower paying, humiliating "sewing rooms." These jobs policies contributed to maintaining women's invisibility as workers and fixing them further as dependents.

• Medical insurance—originally part of Roosevelt's New Deal welfare program—was also eliminated from Social Security. Instead, those who worked for large enterprises in stable, full-time jobs began, largely as a result of unionization, to get private medical insurance. Their gain deepened the stratification of welfare, providing superior health and security for those who were already better off and depriving those who most needed help.

The two tracks had several intersecting dimensions that established the contemporary meanings of "welfare." Federal programs were good, state programs were bad; old-age insurance and unemployment compensation became considered entitlements, AFDC and the other public assistance programs not so; first-track programs were not means-tested, public assistance was. Today "welfare" *means* the inferior programs. And perhaps the greatest value to recipients of the superior programs is that they are not stigmatized, often not even recognized as what they are—recipients of government provision.

The gender inequities in this system were not created by a conspiracy to make women suffer. On the contrary, AFDC was designed by women who might today be called feminists.

* "Single mother" here refers to all categories of women raising children on their own—divorced, separated, unmarried.

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But they were locked into historical misunderstandings, and they made the wrong alliances. They were still under the sway of Victorian family-wage ideology—the assumption that women would be and should be economic dependents of men, and that a single male wage would suffice to support a whole family. They were convinced not only that this ideal could be made functional but also that it was best for women, who could then devote themselves to unpaid household labor. Their short-sightedness came from some good motives: they believed that the family wage was a protection, especially for working-class women, against the exploitation of the double day. They even recognized that the family wage was not widely effective—in fact most American husbands and fathers never earned enough to support their families. But instead of reaching for a new world of economic independence for women and shared housework for men, they sought to shore up the family wage by providing government assistance when men lost their breadwinning ability.

Social Security *was* shaped by racist conspiracy—conspiracy to maintain the supply of low-wage labor, especially for southern interests, by keeping Social Security entitlements from minorities. Ultimately that racism harmed many whites as well: not only were minorities excluded from first-track programs, but second-track programs were made inferior with minorities in mind, and as a result we got stingy and mean-spirited provision for all the poor, white and minority. These limitations were not required by popular opinion; depression-era polls suggest that, had a more universal welfare bill been put to a referendum in 1935, it would probably have won. The exclusions and inequities of the bill were put there to defend a small number of specific economic and racial interests.

The group of women reformers who wrote the public-assistance parts of Social Security missed a unique opportunity to install a welfare state in the United States. Their empirical mistakes, such as their faith in the family wage, were part of the limited vision of their time, their race, and their class. Their more serious mistakes, however, were strategic—they chose the wrong alliances. Politics is always a matter of the allies you choose, although the choices are sometimes constrained. Distant from the poor and retaining an older moral-reform orientation, the New Deal feminists never entirely shed the belief that something more than lack of money was wrong with the poor. So they were convinced that the poor needed casework—counseling and rehabilitation—and they designed AFDC to regulate moral and housekeeping standards as well as to feed poor children. And poor women had no collective representation powerful enough to create an alliance in which they could defend themselves. African-American women had created strong organizations, even national ones such as the National Association of Colored Women, but the New Deal white feminists chose not to make common cause with them. Had they done so, they would have encountered a useful skepticism about the family wage ideal, because women's employment was not only more common but also more respected among blacks. Finally, the New Deal feminists separated themselves from the labor movement; they neither emphasized the importance of a minimum wage and union power nor struggled with the unions to defend women's right to equal wages and equal work.

They chose to ally instead with the technocratic experts brought in by Roosevelt. They thought they were being "half-a-loaf girls," as they put it. But in fact rather than getting something now and something more later, they got a welfare system that grew worse over the decades, increasingly inadequate, and increasingly unequal. Rather than bringing one group after another under the protection of federal security programs, they set in motion a process of fragmentation that weakened the political force of those who believed in a welfare state.

The first signs of the inadequacy of the New Deal system were readable in the 1950s as the welfare caseload increased. This process is almost always described as a bad omen. But it was also a sign that minorities and poor white women were challenging their exclusion, insisting on citizenship rights by claiming

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welfare. One of the many ways in which "the 1960s" began in the 1950s, welfare-claiming was a part of the civil rights movement. We need to understand this in order to avoid the mistaken assumption that being "on welfare" always connotes dependency and despair. On the contrary, for many, especially women, going to the welfare office was a step toward citizenship, often the first entrance into a relationship with government. The 1960s welfare rights movement was also a women's movement. Claiming welfare was a strategy for upward mobility and especially for benefiting one's children, a move away from poverty and resignation.

But then the demand for labor, which had brought so many immigrants and migrants into industrial cities, receded. The new migrants whose urbanization had represented some upward mobility were the last hired and the first fired. And marriage and family patterns changed. Divorce, marital separation, and out-of-wedlock births increased the number of single mothers.

Despite some improvements in the second-track programs such as AFDC, on the whole there has been a downward spiral since the New Deal. The inferior welfare programs—AFDC is the most prominent example—became severely stigmatized, which made their recipients politically weak. These programs exclusively for the poor could not gather the support necessary to keep up with inflation; the poorer and more demoralized welfare recipients became, the less political clout they had.

The stigma and stinginess were not only cruel and unjust but also destructive for the whole society. *The welfare system actually contributed to the creation of today's alleged "underclass."* Our most pernicious and difficult welfare problem is not poverty alone but inequality and the resentment and violence it creates. Although the welfare system kept some from starvation—and kept some mothers from losing their children—it has also contributed to inequality and misery. The hopelessness and poverty it engendered locked people into more hopelessness and poverty. The problem is not, of course, a welfare system per se, as some conservatives claim. The cruelty, barbarism, and violence that would result from refusing to help the poor could destroy our society. The problem is the *design* of the welfare system, which *does* contribute to inferior citizenship, lack of opportunity, and a spirit of defeatism. To help the poor requires offering hope and respect as well as a little food. Historically, the stigma of "welfare" has been as damaging as its financial inequality.

Roosevelt intended his Social Security legislation as a centerpiece of the New Deal and an anchor for his Democratic coalition. But in its long-term effects, Social Security helped unravel that coalition. Conservative and liberal analysts of Democratic party decline often blame an excessively large welfare state. In fact, the limitations and fragmentation of government provision may be more culpable. By creating such great stratification among beneficiaries, Social Security deepened splits among the Democrats' own electoral constituency and undermined the legitimacy of its own welfare system. The popularity of welfare in the depression offered a chance to break southern control of the Democratic party. A law that united all waged and salaried workers through universal entitlements to social citizenship—especially if combined with an anti-lynching law and black voter registration—might have solidified enough support so that Roosevelt could have dumped the southern political magnates on whom he had depended. But in practice, Social Security nourished divisions among Roosevelt's potential supporters.

Most destructive were those between beneficiaries of the primary programs—upper-working-class and middle-class men and their families—and those who got "welfare." As taxes increased, recipients of the secondary programs became scapegoats. The rise of private health insurance and pensions further lessened middle-class support for a shared social citizenship. In electoral politics this meant that national Democrats had to target "swing" voters who (erroneously) did not feel dependent on a welfare state; the neglected and maligned poor who did support welfare were

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increasingly disenfranchised through exclusionary voter-registration policies, then by their own skepticism about the value of voting. This produced a downward spiral: the more the poor did not vote, the more the Democrats focused their appeals on conservative "swing" voters.

Meanwhile, extraordinary changes in the role of women in the forties, fifties, and sixties made the New Deal welfare structure even more destructive. Its failure to support women workers did not stop women's participation in employment, but helped lock them into the worst conditions both at work and at home. For example, AFDC designers were mainly opposed to day care, let alone government subsidies for day care, because they feared it would provide an incentive for mothers to work outside the home. In fact, women's employment was propelled by need, which then interacted with their growing economic independence and self-confidence, contributing to raising the divorce rate and thus the numbers of single mothers. A contradictory reaction criticized some women for being breadwinners and other women, "welfare mothers," for not being breadwinners—for demanding "welfare" in order not to "work." By the 1970s attacks on women's nontraditional sexual and public behavior became a prominent theme in conservative backlash movements against New Deal and "Great Society" social programs. Hostility to "welfare" was nourished by a new kind of conservative coalition, which drew on objections to feminism and sexual "permissiveness," as well as to taxes and the increasing militance among the minority poor.

Imagine how different our society might look today if in 1935 we had gotten:

- an old age pension for every individual
- unemployment compensation for every adult seeking work who could not get it
- universal medical insurance
- regular public jobs programs
- a universal (and hence nonstigmatized) child allowance
- publicly funded preschool and afterschool programs.

We cannot reconstruct the 1935 opportunity today. Too many things are different: a deindustrializing and globalizing economy, a large national deficit, ghettoization, the decline of hope and escalation of weapons and drugs among the poor, for starters. But understanding the history of the Social Security system does provide some useful suggestions for today's welfare discussion:

We can try to change our language. The fact that we use "welfare" to refer only to means-tested programs like AFDC misleads the public about how government social spending is allocated (80 percent goes to the nonpoor) and stigmatizes the recipients of these programs, which then makes it more difficult to gather political support for more constructive policies.

We cannot afford to increase the number of programs only for the poor, which serve to keep them poor. Means-tested programs set up downward spirals, making things worse for recipients *and* generating taxpayer resentment. We should, whenever possible, design universal programs that will command broad support.

Despite the conservative success in defining "welfare reform" to mean cutbacks in benefits, there might be a moment of opportunity now with respect to AFDC. For the first time in history, there is substantial agreement on two issues central to welfare: that there is nothing wrong with mothers being employed; that single motherhood will not go away anytime soon. One condition for the escalated hostility to welfare was that a middle-class-dominated women's movement tended to ignore the needs of poor women; today, as more and more middle-class women are working for wages and raising children alone, many more people can understand that being a single mother is not the result of a character flaw. We can use this limited agreement to improve the system. Welfare programs could recognize that most women will have to be wage earners for most of their lives, and that they have to combine wage work with unpaid domestic work to a much greater extent than men. Welfare could include *both* measures to help women carry out their domestic labor—such as AFDC—*and* measures to help women establish themselves as workers supported by wages—such as

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day-care centers, medical insurance with universal coverage, and decent wages.

An arbitrary time line—two years on AFDC and then out—is a setup for failure or brutality unless it is combined with a higher minimum wage and massive spending on public jobs. Not even individuals, much less families, can live on the low-wage jobs that are often the only ones available to the poor. The cutoff will be difficult to enforce because, I trust, there are too many humane people among us, but it will deepen still further the stigma and therefore the hopelessness of the poor. The goal of welfare reform is not to end welfare claims but to reduce poverty.

Welfare reform could acknowledge both that the private sector cannot create enough jobs and that we need public jobs for women as well as men. Clinton's defeated public jobs proposal remained, like the New Deal, biased toward male jobs. There is desperate need for social-service workers, teachers' aides, day-care workers, community counselors, and so on. BUT these must be real jobs in high-quality programs, paying wage on which one can support a family and offering upward mobility—or they will be self-defeating.

The women's movement could exercise leadership on the question of welfare reform, and choose its alliances carefully. Consider the continuing conflict about public funding for abortion. There is a debate within the women's movement as to whether "choice" must be a reality for poor women or whether we can work for reproductive rights in stages. The historical evidence suggests that "stages" are dangerous because they create downward, not upward, staircases. They actually make it more difficult to include the excluded; they set up two tracks, standard and inferior, and then the workings of government programs themselves further stigmatize the poor. They stratify citizenship itself, whereas the goal of welfare should be democratic equality. □

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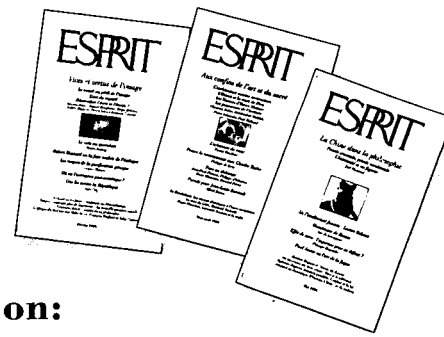

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Elliott D. Sclar

PUBLIC-SERVICE PRIVATIZATION: IDEOLOGY OR ECONOMICS?

In a February 1993 *New York Times* op-ed article, a municipal bond analyst for a major security rating service argued that the cure for New York City's fiscal problems was to force it into bankruptcy and then to massively privatize public services. The writer's only evidence that this could work was an anecdote about a small Michigan town that did precisely that and reportedly saved massive amounts of money. Leaving aside the possibility that the reported cost saving was nothing more than an accounting fiction, the town in question is so small that it falls within the bounds of statistical error on the census of the nation's largest city. Yet for the editors and most readers of that day's paper it was probably the case that neither the idea nor the evidence seemed implausible. Such is the power of conventional wisdom.

New York Newsday columnist Jim Dwyer, commenting upon the influence peddling scandal that arose from the Dinkins administration's attempt to privatize the Parking Violations Bureau, defended the culprits and chastised those who brought the abuse to public attention. He bitterly observed that these high-ranking public officials were only trying to save hard-pressed taxpayers some money. From his perspective, the scandal was a teapot tempest stirred up by bureaucrats trying to hold on to useless jobs at taxpayer expense. How did Dwyer know that the proposed privatization would actually save rather than cost money? He didn't. It was nothing more than a presumption based upon conventional wisdom.

How do I know that? The only study done by New York City before it embarked on its privatization venture suggested that it would likely *cost* the city an additional $61 million. Because that finding was so contrary to the conventional wisdom, it was ignored by city officials. Once scandal erupted, the city's Department of Investigations was forced to reconstruct the chain of events that led to an influence-tainted contracting process. Investigators asked First Deputy Mayor Norman Steisel why the city had proceeded despite its internal cost study. He said the decision to proceed was based on "an intuitive sense that this was worth doing . . . an opportunity that was ripe for privatization." The entire effort went forward on nothing more than the unproved but strongly held belief that privatization had to be cost saving.

I have been studying the economics of public-service privatization for six years. The only thing I can say for sure is that the cost savings case in a large number of instances is dubious at best. Yet the conventional wisdom is so strong that citing fifty cases in which privatization lost money does not offset the evidence of a single case in which savings were attained. Instead, the first fifty findings are typically dismissed either as methodologically flawed studies or as the results of incorrectly administered privatization efforts. The instance in which savings were achieved is hailed as proof positive that more privatization would save more money.

So privatization will save money and it will then be possible to have more service at the same level of taxation or the same amount of

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service at lower taxation. But what if the conventional wisdom is wrong? We would have less service at the same level of taxation or greatly reduced service at only moderately reduced tax levels. That is obviously not the outcome liberals and progressives want. On the other hand, if one believes, as conservatives do, that beyond national defense and police protection the public sector adds little value to society, that is precisely the desired outcome. It is therefore no accident that privatization is most vigorously pushed by the political right. Its support is rooted in its ideological desire to shrink government—particularly programs like education, transportation, medical care, and housing, which foster a redistribution of goods and services to those at the bottom of the social order. However, thanks to the new conventional wisdom, it pursues its ideological goal under the banner of a pragmatic concern for government efficiency.

That the right's concern is ideological rather than pragmatic is revealed by the penchant among conservative privatization advocates to oppose careful cost analyses. In the successful campaign to privatize some transit services in the Denver area, the conservative proponents were careful to have the legislation written to preclude comparing cost alternatives in terms of true taxpayer savings. In Massachusetts, the Weld administration vigorously opposed a recently enacted law that mandates strict cost studies before privatization efforts can proceed. When asked to explain their opposition, the secretary for administration replied: "The governor has said that privatization may make sense if it delivers better services, *even if there is no budget savings*" (emphasis added). The problem, of course, is that quality is in the eye of the beholder. If you don't think the service is necessary in the first place, "better" may mean "less." Indeed, the preamble to the Colorado transit privatization legislation makes no bones about its view that the less transit service provided the better. It views transit as necessary only for a marginal population in a society where the truly productive drive cars.

Every privatization can be justified by ideological advocates as either money saving or quality improving. The result is that it is possible to push ahead with the real conservative agenda of shrinking the public sector even as costs are increasing. Hence, the less cost oversight, the better. Although the debate over the cost effectiveness of privatization is frequently carried on as a pragmatic examination of alternatives, it is in fact a deeper ideological debate about the proper role of the public sector in society.

Roots of the Privatization Argument

Four separate but related factors contribute to the notion that privatization is cost saving: (1) deindustrialization; (2) public sector productivity; (3) the perception of public work; and (4) the emergence of a vigorous promarket political ideology. Let us consider each of these.

1. **Deindustrialization.** The decline of a high-wage manufacturing economy in the United States is a well-known fact. The loss of high wages in the private sector shrinks the federal and state tax bases that support public services. That in turn puts pressure on political leaders to make government more cost effective. The appeal of privatization is that it implies that it is possible both to maintain services and to cut taxes. As long as the electorate believes this, it does not matter whether it is true: it gives elected officials and their political rivals an alternative to defending harder choices. So it is not surprising that politicians across the political spectrum chant the mantra of privatization.

2. **Public Sector Productivity.** Although the fiscal crisis in the public sector is in large part a result of economic stagnation, it also has a unique root that feeds political support for privatization. *Even if the public sector operates as efficiently as possible*, there is an inherent inflationary bias in the cost of many public services. Because the most important services are highly labor intensive, they are not easily enhanced through labor-saving technology or workplace reorganization. A teacher generally becomes less effective by being asked to teach larger classes. Computers help mainly by making information more accessible, not in

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education's central mission of guiding human development. The two major determinants of the productivity of bus drivers are the amount of congestion on the streets and the number of people boarding the bus. Neither of these are improvable by the driver, whether publicly or privately paid. The best ideas in modern policing require more officers to spend more time walking the streets. Effective social work requires intense and long-term contact between clients and agency personnel. Since public-sector employees need to be paid wages that are competitive with private-sector alternatives, these added costs are not easily offset by productivity improvements.

3. **The Perception of Public Work.** there is a pervasive belief that public workers are overpaid and underemployed. The blame for this situation is laid directly at the feet of public-sector labor unions and spineless public officials. Since typically between 60 percent and 75 percent of any government budget is made up of labor costs, it is assumed that if private firms replace government agencies in the direct provision of services, costs simply have to fall. When Edward Rendell ran for mayor of Philadelphia, he would challenge audiences to name the fourteen paid holidays given employees. "It was easy up to eleven or twelve," said his chief aide David Cohen. "The two hardest ones were Lincoln's Birthday and Flag Day." Indeed, according to Rendell, a city worker could qualify for up to sixty-seven paid days off between sick leave, bereavement leave, and vacation. Stories such as these have become the stock-in-trade of privatization advocates, in much the same way that conservatives used tales of "welfare queens" to gut the human service budgets in the last decade. As with the welfare queen stories, the illustrations are not necessarily false. But they distort the true image of ordinary public employment.

In fact, public employees have made no real wage gains in recent years, and their earnings have remained 4 percent to 5 percent below those of private-sector employees in comparable occupations. The perception that public workers have surged ahead of private workers is a reflection of deindustrialization in the private sector rather than profligacy in the public sector. Only about 20 percent of private-sector workers graduated from college compared to over 40 percent of public employees. Any advantage in aggregate public-sector compensation stems from the fact that people with less education have fared worse than those with more education in all job markets in recent years. However, the shift in relative aggregate position has left public workers more politically exposed and vulnerable. Public workers with health and pension benefits and some job protection now stand in stark contrast to the taxpayer/workers in the private sector who have been stripped of comparable status. Indeed, Mayor Rendell makes no bones about his appeal to this latter group of blue- and white-collar Philadelphians to support his drive for privatization.

4. **Pro-Market Ideology.** Many Americans believe that the government that governs least, governs best. Conservatives, who generally oppose government programs because of their redistributional effects, have been able to seize upon this healthy skepticism, along with public concerns about the high cost of government service, to argue that markets provide a less expensive alternative. Through the prodigious production of books, reports, model legislation, op-ed pieces, and so on, in which an idealized neatly competitive market is contrasted to the messy problems of everyday service delivery, conservatives have gained the advantage in the debate over public services. Even mild social democratic interventions such as national health services or single-payer national health insurance systems are thought to lead to gross inefficiency, bureaucracy, and even loss of democratic freedom.

Efficiency Is Not Always What It Seems

When confronted with analyses that show that particular privatization measures will lose money, advocates argue that savings will come in the long run, in some unspecified future when both direct-service personnel and agency-

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management personnel have been reduced to a handful of contract managers.

There are two problems with this vision. First, it ignores the macro-economics of public-sector costs; second, it ignores the historical reasons for the size of public agencies.

Let's begin by considering the economics of public work. Even though 60 percent to 75 percent of typical public-service spending is for employee costs, only about half to two-thirds of that is spent on direct service provision—the costs that would be immediately avoided through privatization. Thus only between one-third and one-half of total public spending is even amenable to short-term privatization. The balance is spent on management, materials, debt services, and so on. But since some portions of the public budget, such as police and fire protection and portions of health care and education, would be politically and culturally hard to privatize, at most, about 20 percent of the budget is really at issue. (In Philadelphia, which is now heralded as a model of privatization success, only about fifteen small operations have actually been privatized, such as a single nursing home and a single parking garage. Other more ambitious ventures are on the drawing board.) Even the most optimistic of privatization advocates typically hold that savings of fifty percent are the best one can hope for through individual privatizations. Thus if everything worked out ideally, overall budgetary savings have an outer limit of about 10 percent. When the real problems of a less than ideal world are taken into account, the likelihood that short-term savings rather than short-term cost increases will occur is small.

Furthermore, attempts to shrink mid-level management through privatization have only a slim chance of success in the long run. Two factors in particular cause the difficulty: the need for accountability and the lack of competitive markets for most services that the public sector provides.

Accountability. The abuses of the few necessitate regulations for the many. In the private sector business owners bear the financial risk for inefficient or fraudulent use of resources. In the public sector this risk is borne by the taxpayers. But where everyone bears the risk, no one bears the risk. In the absence of personal risk, governments institute regulations to protect public resources. If we were to peel back the layers of regulation in almost any agency with a long history of contracting, we would find a series of responses to specific abuses of the public trust by contractors and public officials. The Cuomo administration recently unveiled plans to require every company bidding on contracts in New York State to fill out a detailed questionnaire about its financial background and any criminal history of the firm or its principals. This information will be fed into a centralized data base for the use of all state agencies engaged in contracting. For the vast majority of firms this imposition will feel like one more case of bureaucratic harassment. For small firms with limited resources it will feel even worse. But this regulation was prompted by the finding that close to $200 million per year in taxpayer money ends up in the coffers of organized crime through the contracting system.

This kind of "red tape" is frequently cited by privatization advocates as proof of the inefficiency of bureaucrats. Yet it would be equally fair to cite it as proof of the damage caused by the profit motive. After all, the primary goal for private firms is profits, not public service. Only rarely will the provision of products to government and profits to sellers coincide in the manner idealized by Adam Smith. No one has come up with an inexpensive alternative to regulation for protecting public resources.

Even when individual corruption is not the issue, market incentives often have perverse outcomes. Consider the history of one Reagan era effort to use markets to shrink red tape and bureaucracy: hospital reimbursements by Medicare. Such third-party payment is a form of contracting out. The creation of Diagnostically Related Groups, or DRGs, was hailed by its champions in 1983 as a way to streamline the cumbersome reimbursement process. The idea is simple. Illnesses can be bundled together in a DRG or disease category. The average length of a hospital stay for that "bundle" is

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determined from past experience and hospitals are reimbursed for a covered individual's stay with a flat fee based on that average. If patients are discharged more quickly, the hospitals keep the difference. When they stay longer than the statistical average, the hospital bears the additional cost. Thus hospitals have market incentives to be "efficient." Two benefits were supposed to flow from this. Total hospital costs were expected to decline and both hospitals and government were supposed to cut their billing bureaucracies because of the system's simplicity. In fact, bureaucracies grew and costs increased. The reasons for inflation in hospital costs are not germane to this article, but the reasons for bureaucratic expansion are quite germane. Hospitals quickly learned to increase staff in their medical records departments to ensure that their patient diagnoses maximized Medicare reimbursement. The Social Security Administration, which administers Medicare, had to expand its bureaucracy in order to monitor local hospitals more closely. And patients became subject to a new form of eviction from hospitals. Hospitals tell those who are about to overstay the allowed DRG that they have to leave because government bureaucrats won't allow any more money for their care. Blame is thus shifted from the private contractor back to the stereotypical public bureaucrat from whom no one expects any better.

Are there ways to streamline regulatory and oversight functions? Undoubtedly. But until someone invents a new way to get around the problem of public risk, gains from reform are likely to be marginal at best. The reality is that red tape and mid-level management are needed as the most cost-effective way to stop abuse. The question is whether regulation is being efficiently carried out. It may well be the case that the public sector is doing a very efficient job within its constraints.

Lack of Competitive Markets. Competitive markets do not naturally exist for many of the products for which government is responsible, such as education, law enforcement, treatment and care for the indigent and ill, aerospace exploration, and national defense. To the extent that we seek to have private organizations provide these goods and services, it frequently involves maintaining a stable of contractors who bid against each other in an artificial market created and supervised by government. Because government loses the ability to provide for itself, these bidders are not allowed to fail. Contracting then becomes even less a process of competitive bidding and more one of spreading the work around to keep the suppliers afloat.

By the time the cold war ended, the long and well-documented history of lowball initial contracts followed by massive cost overruns had made it impossible to argue that national defense privatization was cost efficient. No one seriously defends the proposition that hammers should cost $80 or toilet seats $600. The explanation for such outrageous prices was that the defense industry had become a ward of the state. Because of its vital mission, it needed to be subsidized. Occasionally, when news stories about fraud or price fixing became politically intolerable, miscreant contractors were given a slap on the wrist. More drastic action was impossible because the government had no alternatives.

When New York City attempted to privatize the Parking Violations Bureau, city officials hoped to find perhaps two or three competitors to bid on the project. However, given the complexity of the job, only one firm bid. One potential bidder explained to investigators that it would have taken a year before his firm could feel sufficiently knowledgeable to make a proposal. Such complex privatizations invite negotiated price making and influence peddling. The only way to guard against corruption is to have a great deal of oversight with interagency checks and balances. Thus, if privatization moves into the areas of more traditional public service, we will need even more bureaucracy to handle the burgeoning oversight and supervision functions. It is difficult to argue that the replacement of lower cost direct-service personnel by higher cost supervisors is a cost-efficient reorganization.

When issues such as accountability and competition are taken into consideration, it is not clear that any real savings will occur as a

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result of widespread privatization. And since privatization is essentially a process in which a privately paid worker is substituted for a public one, the economic case for it frequently comes down to the claim that the employment cost differential between the two is sufficient to offset the added costs of private-sector supervisors, overhead, and profits, plus the costs of public oversight and supervision of the contracting process.

A Case Study: Denver Transit

In 1989 the Denver Regional Transportation District (RTD) privatized approximately 20 percent of its fixed-route bus operations. It was supposed to be a textbook example of a competitive privatization. The routes were carefully chosen to be representative of the entire system. No one contractor could have all of them. Instead, they were divided into three independent bidding "packages," each of which contained a mix of high and low revenue routes. After four years the packages were to be reopened to competitive bidding. The intention was to create a system in which the RTD was continually purchasing transportation service from the lowest priced seller. The belief that sufficient sellers existed to sustain a competitive market was bolstered by economic studies that demonstrated that large firms do not have inherent cost advantages over smaller ones in the provision of bus services.

In the debate in the Colorado legislature that preceded this change, privatization advocates claimed that the state could expect savings in the range of 40 percent. In 1988 the RTD had an operating budget of about a hundred million dollars per year. Using these estimates, the advocates proclaimed that total privatization would create savings of forty million dollars per year. By implication, the privatization of 20 percent of the system should have led to savings of about eight million dollars per year. In fact, in the three years following the privatization the average operating cost of the system increased by $8 million per year. What happened?

In 1989, the first year of privatization, the average cost of a contract hour was $41.95. In 1993, it was $56.34. By comparison, operating costs on publicly supplied services have risen on average only 1.9 percent per year. In addition, under the terms of the privatization, the contractors retain all fare revenue, estimated at about $5 per hour. Thus it now costs the RTD approximately $61 per revenue hour for its purchase of contract service. I estimate the present in-house cost for the same service at about $52. So the 338,459 hours of privatized service cost the RTD an additional three million dollars over the cost of direct-service provision in 1993. That loss does not include the costs of contract supervision or the attrition costs for paying drivers, mechanics, and cleaning personnel made redundant by the change but who could not be legally terminated. In the first year of the program, the RTD spent 8 percent of the contract price on supervision. For reasons never made clear, after 1991, the RTD cut back supervision to a skeleton staff of about two people. Had it maintained the same high level of supervision, these costs would have added another $1.5 million to the loss.

More important, the much vaunted competitive market of many bidders never materialized. Although there was much initial interest in the service, three national private companies ultimately captured the market: Mayflower Contract Services, Inc., Laidlaw, and ATC Vancom. Typical of the strategy that large firms use to keep small ones out, Mayflower won the first and largest contract with a bid of $28.26 per revenue hour. That was so far below cost that the RTD's privatization auditors concluded that Mayflower lost money at that price. It is impossible for smaller local firms to compete against such big operations, especially when they are willing to sustain large losses. Once Mayflower had broken the ice, contracts to the two other winners, Laidlaw and ATC Vancom, were written at prices of $61.19 and $48.01 respectively. These prices were more reflective of a profitable operation.

The Denver market is now shared by these three contractors. There is no longer even the pretense of competition. Prices among the three

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vary little; the highest is $58.75 and the lowest $54.65. Consistent with its new labor agreement with the RTD, Amalgamated Transit Union Local 1001 tried to win back the service provided by Mayflower through submission of its own bid. Ignoring its own contracting procedures, the RTD allowed Mayflower to "revise" its initial bid and keep its routes. At this point the issue of privatization was transformed from one of economics into one of politics. It no longer matters whether contracting is less or more expensive; the contractors are now an integral part of the Denver transit process and must be politically accommodated. The only question is how the work will be divided among the three firms in the RTD's "contractor stable."

When the legislation was written, the advocates, many acting from sincerely held beliefs about the beneficence of markets, were trying to put a truly competitive bidding system in place. When examples of privatization gone awry are presented, advocates often argue that the efforts failed because the competitive bidding process was not sustained. In this case every effort was made to ensure that it would be. Yet as it is typically the case in public contracting, the situation evolved into one of oligopoly—competition among a few sellers. In such situations price is not driven as much by cost as by political or market power and hence the ability to impose a price on the buyer. Cost and efficiency considerations are now beside the point. The RTD's decisions increasingly reflect the political calculations it must make among its contractor stable, its unions, and the state legislature. The needs of the riding public become even more difficult to accommodate in light of the needs of these other, more powerful groups. Such is the danger in viewing privatization as a simple cost-effective solution to a public service problem.

Putting the Debate Into Perspective

In general there are two situations in which outside purchase of service can be cost saving. The first is where government can avail itself of an existing efficient private market. Thus, when Mayor Rendell of Philadelphia contracts out the management of a parking garage or a nursing home, he is turning to an established private market for a service of known quality and price. Economists do not call such determinations privatization. They have customarily been called "make-buy" decisions. Every organization, whether public or private, has to decide how to organize its resources. The general rule is that when internal costs are lower than external ones, organizations "make" the product. When the calculus is reversed, they "buy" from outside suppliers. Thus, some automobile manufacturers find it is more economical to produce the components that go into their vehicles, while others find parts suppliers a more cost-effective option. Some local school districts find it is more economical to provide school bus service; others find contracting less expensive. There is a large gray area here, having to do with the unique conditions faced by each organization and the alternatives available in the external markets.

The second situation is a variant of the first. It arises when new technologies render older forms of organization obsolete. In the past it may have been necessary for government to maintain office supply warehouses where federal agencies could shop for supplies. Through bulk buying and decentralized distribution locations, this arrangement brought far-flung federal agencies good value for their dollars. But modern communications and overnight package services are such that even the most remote government locations can now get next day delivery from large discount office suppliers at low negotiated prices. Thus, it may well be that certain agencies can be drastically reorganized through "make-buy" decisions.

Most products that can be purchased advantageously by public agencies are already being purchased. Thus, although a second look under the guise of privatization may yield some overlooked nook or cranny where buying is cheaper than making, this is not what privatization advocates have in mind. Privatization occurs when political leaders move beyond traditional "make-buy" decisions and seek to have private organizations take over provision

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of goods or services central to the mission of the public sector. These are situations that by definition do not have thriving natural private markets, situations in which government is the sole or principal customer. The danger here is that ever more costly and complex public supervision of both the bidding process and the administration of contracts will be required. The evidence from the history of defense contracting, NASA, Medicare and Medicaid, and so on, cannot be overstated. Such costly regulatory undertakings have sharply diminishing returns. Ever more costly supervision is put in place to yield less and less effective additional protection of public resources. If we create still more artificial markets through expanded privatization of traditional services, the public sector will become less effective on two counts: regulation will absorb ever more resources and government will lose its ability to do for itself. Getting out of the mess will be far more difficult than getting in. Once contractors get into the public process they do not fade quietly into the night when needs change. The cold war has ended, but not the political influence of defense contractors over the federal budget. Privatization carries the risk that the public sector will sink into a morass of ineffective regulation of overpriced and inefficient but politically connected contractors. More money will be spent for less output, the worst outcome for liberals and progressives, but tolerable for conservatives.

If we are to change this situation, two actions are imperative. First, loose generalizations about the cost effectiveness of privatization must not stand unchallenged. Second, the issue of public-sector productivity must become central to a progressive agenda. It is ironic that just as American industry is finally making a break from discredited nineteenth-century Tayloresque concepts that link productivity to strict discipline of workers, the public sector appears to be rushing headlong back in time. Public officials often concede that many privatizations are more expensive. However, they defend them as a management tool. From their point of view, such competition or the threat of it is the only way to move their employees to accept change in the workplace. The intellectual and political shortcomings of this approach have been abundantly demonstrated by the high rates of productivity achieved by Japanese, and, increasingly, American, industry with management methods based on cooperation rather than coercion. There is no reason to believe that public managers will be more successful with archaic and ineffective techniques than private managers were.

If American firms have to compete in a new market-driven international economy, they will be in serious trouble if the social and public infrastructure that supports them is grossly inefficient. Average Americans will suffer a worse drop in their living standards if the public sector is permitted to become more inefficient. Finally, it is the public sector that is the dispenser of social justice. It is difficult to envision America sustaining itself as a progressive democracy with that role impaired. □

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Margaret Weir

URBAN POVERTY AND DEFENSIVE LOCALISM

The politics of race and poverty in the United States presents something of a paradox. Throughout the past decade and a half, the nation has been obsessed with the urban minority poor. Fears about the growth of a separate, violent, and immoral culture in our nation's cities appeared prominently in the popular media. At the same time, however, there was very little in the way of a sustained national response to the problems of the minority poor in cities. President Reagan's "War on Drugs" quickly fizzled, initial enthusiasm for the 1988 reform of welfare was short-lived, and specifically urban issues all but disappeared from the national agenda.

Underpinning this curious blend of attention and neglect were two prominent features of a new politics of race and poverty. The first was a spotlight on the "underclass," conceived in behavioral terms and tied specifically to racial minorities, rather than a focus on the poor or the needy, more broadly defined. The second was a politics of "defensive localism," which aimed to reduce domestic spending by the federal government, push responsibilities down to lower levels of government, and contain the social problems associated with poverty—and their costs—within defined spatial and political boundaries.

This new politics was not explicitly organized around race, but racial antipathies were nonetheless central to its success. A politics organized around defensive localism contests our claims to be a pluralistic society: spatial divisions make the experience of diversity less frequent, racial differences become territorial and jurisdictional divisions. When combined with reduced national responsibility, spatial location becomes a key determinant of future life opportunities. The sharpening of spatial divisions and the withdrawal of the federal government thus ultimately challenge our notions of a common citizenship.

The Politics of the Underclass

The politics of the underclass in the 1980s was a stepchild of the politics of poverty that crystallized two decades earlier. The two are not identical: the War on Poverty emphasized opportunity and sought to prepare the poor to take advantage of economic prosperity. By contrast, during the 1980s, policy makers across the political spectrum emphasized the responsibilities of the poor, and the underclass became synonymous with the "undeserving poor." Two features of poverty policy in the 1960s paved the way for this transformation. The first was a concentration on the individual attributes of the poor rather than on the economy; the second was the focus on racial minorities.

The planners of the War on Poverty emphasized the personal attributes of the poor as the crux of the policy problem. The macroeconomists who designed the original poverty programs paid very little attention to the structure of the economy, and they fended off efforts to highlight problems of underemployment and low pay. Instead, they emphasized the need to prepare the poor to take

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advantage of the opportunities that the economy, properly stimulated, would produce.

In addition, those who framed the War on Poverty had little sense of how to give the program an enduring political rationale. Historian Carl Brauer quotes one of the poverty planners as arguing, "The program ought to be presented quite frankly in terms of the obligations which a prosperous majority owes to a submerged and desperately poor minority."[1] Later, President Johnson tried to provide a strong rationale for special assistance to the African-American poor on the basis of past rights denied them. But the racial focus and the preoccupation with individual attributes proved to be a volatile mix. When poverty did not disappear within a few years, as the president initially promised, it became easy for opponents of his programs to blame the poor. Political support for expanding the War on Poverty never emerged, and, as riots shook major cities across the nation, support for existing programs began to unravel.

The legacy of the 1960s fed into the discussions of the 1980s in several ways. Most centrally, it disconnected the problems of the African-American poor from the problems of other sectors of society. In popular portrayals throughout the decade, stories about individual behavior overshadowed arguments about the effects of broader social or economic trends.

In addition, the focus on the underclass helped to stifle broader debates about poverty and growing economic inequalities throughout the eighties. Most attempts to estimate the size of the underclass found it to be less than 10 percent of the poor. Nonetheless, the biggest social policy debates of the decade focused on welfare reform; the broader issues of poverty and the working poor remained on the periphery of public attention. Academic discussion about growing wage inequality in the United States and the declining wages of men with low educational levels never commanded serious policy attention.

The politics of the underclass in the 1980s rested on a thinly veiled exploitation of racial fears and antipathies. Race was a critical "wedge" issue that Republicans relied on to split Democratic constituencies. Although the concept of the underclass was ostensibly nonracial, in practice it was clearly identified with poor urban minorities. On occasion—most notably the use of the Willie Horton advertisement in the 1988 presidential campaign—political leaders sought explicitly to arouse racial fears. For the most part, however, direct references to race were not necessary. The very organization of American politics meant that simply withdrawing the federal government from many arenas of social and economic policy reinforced and deepened racial divisions.

The Politics of Defensive Localism

The second major feature of the politics of race and poverty is "defensive localism." Changes in politics and policy during the 1980s worked to concentrate social problems within particular areas, limiting the responsibilities of more broadly charged public agencies. These changes increased the importance of local political boundaries by sharpening inequalities in public services and quality of life across jurisdictions. The clearest indicator of this politics was the abandonment of a national urban policy during the 1980s.

The politics of defensive localism, which makes localities responsible for the problems that occur within their jurisdiction, creates a self-reinforcing dynamic. As poor localities become less attractive, those who can exit do, further diminishing the pool of common resources. In this segmented world, the urban poor grow increasingly distant from the suburban majority. Not surprisingly, it becomes harder to build political support for policies that address urban poverty: the problems of the urban poor not only appear intractable, they are now fundamentally unimaginable to most Americans.

Although defensive localism has achieved a new prominence, it draws strength from features deeply embedded in American politics. Two features of American politics, in particular, tend to fragment the public sphere. The first is the power of local government; the second is the organization of social policy,

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which devolves considerable power to states and localities.

Although municipalities in the United States lack formal constitutional recognition—they exist at the discretion of state governments—they exercise substantial powers. Among the most important is control over land use. Through zoning and other measures formally meant to ensure local health and safety, localities determine what kinds of people can live and what kinds of businesses can operate within their borders.

Not only are municipalities powerful, they are relatively easy to form. Areas often split away from existing jurisdictions to form new ones. Expanding existing jurisdictions, by way of annexation or consolidation, is usually much more difficult. And chief among the many incentives to form separate political jurisdictions is the key role of local property taxes in financing public schools.

These features of American local political organization, often praised as the essence of American democracy, provide powerful incentives for well-off citizens to form separate political jurisdictions, thus shielding themselves from the economic costs and political dangers of coping with the less well-off. The impulse to separate is especially driven by racial and ethnic antipathies. Of these, racial antipathies have been by far the most durable, leading to what Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton have called "American apartheid."[2] In the postwar era, these divisions have taken their most vivid form in the split between cities and suburbs.

The incentives to fragment political jurisdictions are reinforced by the organization of social policy. Critical areas of social policy—most important, housing and education—remain strongly tied to local prerogatives and capacities.

American housing policies not only failed to provide much support for city residents, they also reinforced the divisions between city and suburb. The centerpiece of housing policy, the tax deduction for interest on home mortgages, was of little use to the majority of poor urban dwellers. Perhaps most crucially, the construction of public housing remained contingent on local acceptance; middle-class communities could and did reject publicly subsidized low-cost housing across the United States from the 1930s on.

The local provision of public education has been a cornerstone of American democracy. The quality of education remains deeply connected to local financing despite considerable expansion of state funding for education since the 1960s. As metropolitan areas have segmented by income, deep inequalities in the provision of education have emerged.

The federal government has played a dual role in the creation of defensive localism. Many of the policies enacted after World War II spurred the fragmentation of metropolitan areas and the division of citizens by income and race. At the same time, however, the federal government put into place compensatory policies to cushion the differences in resources across local political boundaries.

Washington supported suburban life by building highways, promoting automobile use, and subsidizing private homeownership, especially through the favorable tax treatment of mortgages. It also engaged in practices that encouraged racial exclusion. Most significantly, until the late 1960s, the federal government sanctioned discrimination in housing markets through rules that made it difficult to obtain federally insured mortgages in racially mixed neighborhoods. Moreover, geographic discrimination or "redlining" sent the overwhelming majority of federal home loan guarantees to the white suburbs, rather than to urban neighborhoods.

Similarly, the federal government bowed to local opposition to subsidized housing that might have promoted integration. Public housing, launched during the 1930s, remained a small program targeted to the very poor.[3] Subsidized housing still comprises only about 4 percent of the American housing stock. The opposition of the building industry to public spending in this area and the local option to accept or reject subsidized housing kept it in the cities—and out of the suburbs. Moreover, localities that did build public housing repro-

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duced the existing segregated housing patterns, ensuring that public housing for African Americans would be located in the already crowded and deteriorating inner city.

Together, the power of local governments and the federal underwriting of decentralization carved metropolitan areas into distinct jurisdictions defined by income and race. Cities were left to shoulder the burden of metropolitan poverty. In addition, fragmentation spurred competition to attract well-off populations and business. Cities, increasingly, were the losers in these contests.

However, several federal government programs cushioned the spatial inequalities that accompanied the suburban exodus. The urban renewal program helped local governments underwrite major physical renewals of their central business districts. In the 1960s, Democrats undertook new programs, such as Model Cities, that sought to improve the quality of life for poor urban residents. The creation of the Department of Housing and Urban Development in 1965 signaled the special place that urban aid would have at the federal level. Even with the election of Richard Nixon in 1968, federal assistance for poor localities continued. No-strings-attached revenue sharing and Community Development Block Grants enacted under Nixon used different approaches but reflected a similar sense that localities, and especially cities, required special aid from the federal government.

For Democratic presidents, helping cities was good politics. The urban vote—together with the solid South—had made up the electoral core of the national Democratic party since the New Deal. The urban vote was even more important than its size would suggest because it was an organized bloc vote that could be "delivered" by local politicians. The significance of urban interests within the party as a whole was clear in Congress, where Democrats from suburban areas in the North voted heavily in favor of aid to cities.

Demographic shifts during the 1980s contributed to the political eclipse of cities, however. In 1960 the nation's population was evenly divided among cities, suburbs, and rural areas. By 1990, both urban and rural populations had declined, with cities becoming poorer and more minority. Nearly half the nation lived in the suburbs. The terms of partisan competition did not take long to register these changes. Republicans mobilized a distinctive suburban political identity. During the 1960s and 1970s central cities and suburbs in the North and Midwest tended to vote in similar directions; by 1980 the suburban and urban vote had split sharply, with cities remaining the only Democratic stronghold.

Policy changes in the 1980s drove deeper wedges between cities and suburbs and made it increasingly difficult for cities to address the deepening poverty within their borders. Such city-suburb splits were particularly sharp in the Northeast and Midwest, where city boundaries had been essentially fixed in the early decades of the century. But even in the more "elastic" cities of the Sunbelt, city-suburban divisions emerged in the wake of immigration by poor Hispanics and economic recession.[4]

The declining political importance of cities was reflected in the abandonment of many federal urban programs. The only programs totally eliminated during the 1980s were those that particularly benefited cities. In 1981 Congress ended the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, which cities had used (unofficially) to bolster the ranks of their employees. General revenue sharing, which provided extra funds for localities, ended in 1986. Urban Development Action Grants were all but eliminated and subsidized housing severely cut. Overall, grants for cities were cut almost in half.

Cities fared only slightly better at the hands of the states. Long dominated by rural interests, state governments instituted reforms during the 1960s and 1970s that gave urban areas more equal representation. But by that time, suburban influence overshadowed the cities in many statehouses. Although some states compensated cities for the withdrawal of federal aid in the 1980s, others took only limited steps or actually worsened cities' problems. State legislatures often rejected urban efforts to raise local taxes. States did

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little to guide the development that continued to spur the exodus from the cities, nor did they do much to improve possibilities for cooperation across city-suburban boundaries. Toward the end of the decade, recession-strained state budgets were simply unable to provide significant aid.

Cities were left alone to shoulder the twin burden of needy populations and a precarious economic base. To attract private development, urban leaders offered tax abatements and other incentives, in the process heightening interjurisdictional competition, draining future tax revenues, and reducing the scope for local public action. Other strategies, such as forming special taxing authorities within cities (with a variety of names such as Business Improvement Districts), further fragmented the public tax base.

The intergovernmental transfers that had helped sustain cities during the 1960s and 1970s represented a national recognition of the special fiscal burden cities carried because of the concentrations of poor within their borders. For the most part, the transfers did not directly serve the urban poor, or even appreciably stem the flight to the suburbs, but they did provide a cushion that allowed for higher levels of public services such as libraries, police protection, and infrastructural maintenance to improve the quality of urban life. As these funds dried up, cities compensated by seeking private investment, often relying on tax abatements. This strategy increased private wealth in cities, but it precipitated a deterioration of urban public services, undermining efforts to rebuild an urban middle class and stem the further decline of the poor.

Changes in industrial structure and the location of industry also exacerbated the economic burden and political isolation of cities. The lack of metropolitan planning in the United States meant that the revolution in information technologies resulted in an extreme form of suburban sprawl. As new businesses and commercial centers appeared in suburban "edge cities," the connections between city and suburb further attenuated. In a 1991 poll, 51 percent of metropolitan New Yorkers said that events in the city had hardly any effect on their lives (*New York Times*, December 1, 1992 and January 2, 1992).

The story of social policy decentralization, the reduction of federal aid to cities, and the divisions between cities and suburbs can all be told without mentioning race. But racial fears and antagonisms form the subtext to each of these developments. Moreover, the concentrations of poor minorities in cities meant that each of these policy decisions had devastating consequences for the largely minority urban poor. It also meant that racial concerns would affect the fate of any proposed solutions to cope with urban poverty.

The Road Ahead

Location has always been important in the United States, with its history of states' rights and a weak federal government. But we think of the period since the New Deal as an era of national policy, which created a foothold for universal social policies and sanctioned a range of federal actions that cushioned local economic differences. The spatial divisions created since the war have worked against this equalizing thrust by nurturing localistic challenges to nationalization and weakening universalizing impulses in social policy.

The sharp spatial differences we have created in the past forty years have segmented American citizenship. Thus, sixty years after the New Deal, the kind of housing, health care, education, level of personal safety, and public amenities available to citizens are highly variable across space. These basics of life are obviously of special importance in creating opportunities for young people. Our failure to remedy spatial divisions ensures the persistence of poverty across generations.

Policy debates often divide those who prefer local empowerment and those who advocate universal programs. But spatial divides ultimately frustrate both policy strategies. In a spatial context segregated by race and income, local empowerment can become a very conservative goal that allows the broader political community to concentrate social and economic problems in particular places and refuse to take responsibility for those problems. On the other

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hand, universal programs that involve more than checkwriting (as do such critical areas as health care and employment) are likely to be very uneven across place. Unless variations in resources and needs are remedied, policies will not be truly universal.

What, then, do these spatial divisions suggest for politics and policy? One option, metropolitan centralization—uniting cities and suburbs in a single jurisdiction—can be dismissed at the outset. Politically, it is a nonstarter. Moreover, large political jurisdictions, such as those found in many Sunbelt cities, are no guarantee that the interests of the poor will be addressed. In many instances smaller jurisdictions have more readily represented the interests of the minority poor. Although we might resist further fragmentation of metropolitan areas, the difficulties associated with centralization make it an unattractive strategy. Rather than seeking to erase existing jurisdictional boundaries, we should aim to create economic and social links across jurisdictions, so that boundary lines become less salient.

The goal should be to reduce the great differences in quality of life and life opportunities across place. The policy debate often frames this as a choice between assisting people or places. This is a false opposition. Reducing spatial differences entails mixing people up more by jurisdiction and strengthening the poor communities that now exist. But is also requires a third strategy: the need to build a variety of links among different communities.

We need to build more connections across place to reduce isolation and expand opportunities open to the minority poor, even as we use universal policies and community strengthening to reduce the salience of place, creating the "weak ties" that provide a culturally diverse society with some coherence. This goal has implications for how we design policies: job training should encourage crossing current spatial divisions; community development should not aim for "self-sufficiency" but should deliberately link inner-city entrepreneurs with wider markets; transportation and job information systems must reconnect cities and suburbs.

Such measures will not by themselves end poverty or transform racial problems. But they do interrupt the logic of defensive localism, which has simultaneously increased the isolation of the poor and frustrated policy efforts to address urban poverty. We need to change the way Americans talk and think about the needs of the minority poor; rekindling the nation's will to address urban poverty will not only help the poor, it is also an essential part of rebuilding the sense of national community and public purpose that is now deeply eroded. □

Notes

[1] Carl M. Brauer, "Kennedy, Johnson and the War on Poverty," *Journal of American History* 69 (June 1982):110.

[2] Douglas Massey and Nancy A. Denton, *American Apartheid* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1993).

[3] There were some exceptions, where state governments supplemented the federal program. The most outstanding case is New York, where public housing accommodates a sizable working-class population.

[4] Elastic cities is the term used by David Rusk, *Cities without Suburbs* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins Press, 1993).

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Ruth Rosen

NOT PORNOGRAPHY!

For more than four decades, the cold war chilled political debate about what women and American families need for their well-being. The family was sacrificed to cold war hysteria and military over-investment. National health programs and child care looked too much like "what they did in the communist bloc." Then the abortion wars of the 1980s channeled feminists' energy and resources into fighting "pro-life" attacks on women's reproductive rights.

Now that the cold war is over and the abortion wars have subsided, we are entitled to an intellectual dividend. At long last, old preoccupations can be replaced by a practical focus on urgent social and economic needs. The time is ripe to forge a new feminist agenda that can cross class and race lines and have some impact on the lives of ordinary women and their families.

To judge from the media, however, you would think that pornography is the greatest obstacle facing American women today. It's not. Poverty and violence, not pornography, are the pressing feminist issues of the 1990s. Someone should explain this to Catharine MacKinnon, the charismatic feminist legal scholar who has waged a passionate campaign against pornography in the United States. MacKinnon and her followers have played a decisive role in turning the feminist movement away from women's most urgent problems.

Feminists have clashed over pornography ever since the 1970s. Some have closed their eyes, held their noses, committed to the principle of free speech. Others, like MacKinnon, have argued that since pornography actually causes sexual violence against women—a claim hotly contested by many social scientists—it should be banned. In her recent book *Only Words*, MacKinnon goes even further, arguing that pornography is not merely speech with certain known effects, but is itself a hostile act that must be banned as a violation of women's civil rights. For her, words are literally the same as acts; like sticks and stones, they break your bones. Her argument is seductively clever: if pornography is a hostile act, then protecting women from violence takes precedence over any defense of smut as free speech.

MacKinnon's argument that sexual violence violates women's civil rights is certainly right. Rape is a terrorist act that reinforces women's inequality. Domestic violence, too, in my view, is an act of terrorism against women. *But sexual and domestic violence and pornography are not the same thing*. Watching or reading pornography is not raping or beating women. True, pornography reinforces degraded images of women. But if pornography is, as many feminist scholars and activists contend, and as I believe, a symptom rather than a cause of American society's misogyny, then MacKinnon's effort to pit free speech against women's equality creates a bogus choice.

Chipping away at the First Amendment, moreover, is never a good idea; it is especially dangerous for groups committed to radical social change. Censorship, the historical record reveals, is more likely to be used to silence leftists and feminists than pornographers who profit from the sale of sexual fantasies. The situation in Canada is a case in point. In 1992, MacKinnon's arguments or arguments like hers led the Canadian Supreme Court to permit censorship of pornography whenever it portrays "women as a class as objects for sexual exploitation." Not surprisingly, censors first targeted gay and lesbian bookstores. Uninformed and confused customs officials have also seized books written

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by Oscar Wilde, Audre Lorde, Marguerite Duras, and Jean Genet.

The problem with the campaign against pornography is that its sensational nature obscures women's more urgent needs for economic equality and protection from (actual, not literary or cinematic) violence. How many women would identify pornography as the source of their misery? Ask a single mother raising her children on the minimum wage if pornography is her greatest problem. Ask a battered wife. Visit an illegal sweatshop and ask immigrant women if pornography is the cause of their degraded existence. Ask a mother who daily shields her children from stray bullets in the inner city. Go to a poor neighborhood polluted by toxic waste and ask the mothers there if pornography is what most threatens the health of their families.

Consider instead what does affect women's daily lives. Without economic equality, women can't leave violent husbands. Without accessible quality child care, women can't work—or get off welfare. Without an adequate minimum wage, women can't feed their families. Without paid family leave, many working mothers must choose between economic survival and the well-being of their babies. Without a ban on guns and assault weapons, women can't protect their children. Without a drastic change in the terms of the social contract, women can't walk the streets or relax at home without fearing sexual or domestic violence.

Today, every industrialized democracy—with the exception of the United States and South Africa—has extensive national policies designed to protect the family. In most of Northern Europe, paid parental leave, child care, and health care are supported by the state. In some Scandinavian countries, welfare is provided to all citizens, not only mothers, who require support. In contrast, Americans flounder about in search of private or market solutions to what should be viewed as common social concerns. And the American welfare state plays patriarchal father to its welfare mothers, treating them as undeserving inferiors.

What then should be the core of a new domestic feminist agenda in the wake of the cold war and the abortion wars? We need a legislative program that will support American families and protect women's rights. If feminists are to reach a new generation, they must address concretely the precarious lives of contemporary women—at home and in the workplace. To begin, we need:

- Quality child care for working parents;
- Paid family leave to care for new or adopted infants and elderly parents;
- Protection of reproductive choice, including public funding of abortion and contraception and the availability of RU486;
- Family-friendly work policies that honor women's childbearing and parents' childrearing responsibilities;
- Bans against handguns and assault weapons;
- Federal action against environmental policies that pollute the communities of the poor and minorities;
- A higher minimum wage;
- Nonpunitive welfare reform that offers government training, educational support, and jobs to any citizen in need, not just welfare mothers;
- Expanded judicial and educational programs that redefine domestic violence as terrorism against women;
- Serious public education about the difference between consensual sexual relations and the abuse of power that constitutes harassment and "date rape;" and
- Federally mandated comparable worth programs in both the private and public sectors.

The list could go on. The truth is that so-called "women's issues" really address human concerns—the well-being of men and children as well. American women glue together the nation's fragile families and communities. When the country ensures the welfare of its women—whether they are patients or doctors, professionals or domestic workers, homemakers or the homeless, agricultural workers or computer assemblers, suburban matrons or welfare mothers—it addresses the needs of all its citizens. Feminism will cease to be marginal, not when women adopt

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MacKinnon's antipornography platform, but when they recognize that housing discrimination and toxic pollution are also "women's issues."

Reinventing Feminism

In fact, the women's movement is reinventing itself. While the media focus on pornography, the cutting edge of feminist activism has been taken over by grass-roots women in poor communities and by global activists who are reformulating women's rights as human rights.

Partly as a result of high unemployment and a "downsizing" economy, more women slip into poverty each year. According to the U.S. census, 63.2 percent of those living below the poverty line are women. And it is these women who are redefining quality food, jobs, education, and safety as feminist issues. In May 1992, over four hundred women from across the country gathered in Oakland, California, at the National Survival Summit/Poor Women's Convention. "We're under attack and fighting back" became the slogan of the movement. Economic justice, for these women, is the highest priority. Even the National Organization for Women (NOW), under the leadership of Patricia Ireland, has adopted a resolution defining poverty as a feminist issue.

This is a struggle about survival, and as in the decade-old Movement for Environmental Justice, it is poor women who have assumed the leadership of relatively new grass-roots organizations. In Oakland, again, the Women's Economic Action Project (WEAP), an advocacy and lobbying group, trains low-income women to fight for economic and social reform. "The emergence of a new women's movement," says Ethel Long-Scott, WEAP's executive director, "led by poor women, represents the beginning of an effort to bring new electoral leadership to the county. We need to extend [the program] to the national level."

While grass-roots activists redefine poverty as a feminist issue, global activists are reformulating women's rights. In Spring 1993, at the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, feminists fought for and won a resolution that "the human rights of women and of the girl-child are an inalienable, integral, and individual part of universal human rights." The resolution included a commitment to eliminate violence against women in public and private life. Delegates from across the globe joined together to challenge the cultural relativism that reinforces patriarchal domination of women. Wife beating, arranged marriages, genital mutilation, dowry deaths, and other "local customs" must now be regarded as violations of human rights.

Compared to this work, the anti-pornography crusade just doesn't measure up; it is a diversion. MacKinnonites might ask: Doesn't pornography bother you at all? Yes, it does, though in truth I worry more about the images of women that assault us daily through popular and commercial culture than about pornographic representations. Every day, more men are exposed to degrading images of women on network television or in Hollywood films than in pornography. I worry about the cumulative impact of watching women depicted as idiotic bimbos or castrating careerists. I worry that no one sees pictures of ordinary women—competent workers and loving partners. I worry about the women who see the same corrupting images and, if they can afford it, run to a cosmetic surgeon in search of an unreachable ideal of ageless beauty. I worry about young men who learn on the street and from rap music, not from pornography, that it's cool to hit their women. I worry about a culture that glamorizes contempt for women.

Americans are obsessed with sex, and often with sex of a debased, misogynistic sort. So it is not surprising that many American feminists have focused on pornography. Nonetheless, neither popular culture nor pornography are crimes. Nor are they the worst of obscenities. Real obscenity, it seems to me, is a hungry child, a hopeless teenager, a homeless family, a battered wife, or the permanently unemployed victim of capital flight.

The greatest indecency anywhere on the planet is not pornography but poverty in the midst of plenty. □

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David Miller

F.A. HAYEK: DOGMATIC SKEPTIC

Friedrich von Hayek, who died in 1992, is widely recognized as the most influential exponent of free-market liberalism in the twentieth century. Although the democratic left is unlikely to find his views very palatable, at least one lesson can be learned by contemplating Hayek's life. He shows us what can sometimes be achieved by sticking doggedly to your guns, ignoring intellectual fashion, and waiting until your moment comes. Hayek had only one tune to play, the virtues of the free-market economy as opposed to central planning, but he played it with panache, could improvise longer or shorter versions as the occasion demanded, and above all never gave up practicing. As a result, when his moment finally did arrive sometime in the mid-1970s, everything was ready and in place. Anyone who advocated rolling back the state, deregulating this or that industry, privatizing this or that service, and wanted some solid philosophy to back him up, could turn to the works of Hayek, standing side by side on the shelves, and all telling essentially the same story. To the Thatcherites and Reaganites of the 1970s and 1980s, he was what Marx had been to the socialists of the 1880s and 1890s.

To say that Hayek, from his early essays of the 1930s to his last book, *The Fatal Conceit: The Errors of Socialism*, published in 1988, was in this way a formidably consistent advocate is not to deny that there were some deep tensions in his thinking. I shall discuss this later. But these tensions are not obvious to anyone coming to his writings looking for a political message. The message is articulated with a clarity and precision that would put most of his opponents to shame. It is classical liberalism, defended in the way that gives the fewest possible hostages to fortune. There are no references to natural rights or inviolable spheres of liberty or imaginary social contracts. Instead the argument turns on the impossibility of organizing a complex economy in any way other than through a free market. Those who advocate replacing the market with central planning suppose that the planners could possess knowledge of a kind that they can never in fact possess. You may try to direct the economy centrally, as communist leaders did, or to impose some pattern of redistribution, as social democrats have done, but you will certainly fail, and meanwhile everyone, including those who are already worst off, will suffer. If you accept this argument, then, as Hayek points out, it may still be logically possible to defend socialism, but no sane person would ever attempt it.

Hayek's view of the world was Manichaean. On one side stood liberty, limited government, and the market economy; on the other stood coercion, authoritarian government, and planning. It was essential to his argument that there should be no halfway houses. Full-scale planning would be economically disastrous, but trying to *compromise* between the market and planning, using government agencies to direct investment while relying on market pricing of consumer goods, for instance, would be worse still. Behind this lay his view that the two political systems were the embodiments of two opposed philosophies, both with deep roots in European culture. The first of these embraced those who emphasized the limits and fallibilities of the human intellect, drawing from this the conclusion that in social affairs we must proceed cautiously and pragmatically, using trial and error and relying to a large extent on

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inherited traditions. Among these thinkers were Mandeville, Hume, Burke, Adam Smith, Carl Menger, and Ludwig von Mises. The second embraced those who subscribed to one or other form of "constructivist rationalism," the view that we can, in principle, fully understand the workings of society as well as of nature, and in consequence can redesign it to fulfill our conscious desires. Into this camp fell Descartes, Hobbes, Bacon, Bentham and the utilitarians, nineteenth-century positivists such as Comte, Marx, and the whole of the socialist camp. Ultimately, then, the question of economic freedom versus planning was a question of knowledge. Those who advocated the latter were not simply making an empirical error, they were supposing that the human mind was capable of acquiring a kind of knowledge that, according to Hayek, was categorically unobtainable. And for that reason, no compromise with the enemy was possible.

Hayek's political attitudes hardened as he grew older. In his essays on socialism from the 1930s, he writes respectfully of those (such as Oskar Lange) who acknowledge the defects of the older models and attempt to incorporate elements of competition and market pricing into their economic framework. Although he believes that these proposals are misguided, he appears to sympathize with the motives that led Lange and others to make them. His war-time writings, culminating in *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), composed in circumstances where belief in the efficacy of (partial) planning was widespread, again display the same conciliatory impulse. The book is dedicated "To the Socialists of All Parties," and Hayek is careful to point out that there is need for a certain kind of planning (primarily legislation to enhance competition) in a market economy. There are no such impulses in his later books, where his critique of socialism is extended to cover all ideas of social justice, and where socialism itself is finally denounced, in his last book, as a recipe for mass starvation. The fact that the tide of opinion had begun to flow in his favor does not seem to have produced in Hayek any wish to seek the middle ground, but, on the contrary, to have evoked ever sterner denunciations of those who wish in any way to depart from classical liberal orthodoxy.

This throws considerable doubt on the suggestion that the key to Hayek's thinking is to be found in his opposition to totalitarian political doctrines. Plainly he belonged to that generation of European liberals who had to confront the combined impact of Soviet communism and Fascism, and it is tempting to suppose that Hayek's attacks on planning and socialism are motivated by a wish to protect liberal democracies from totalitarian infection. Evidence to support this suggestion might be found in *The Road to Serfdom*, where Hayek lays a good deal of stress on the socialist origins of Nazism, and argues that the adoption of socialist policies elsewhere might be expected to culminate in a form of Fascism. Reduced to its essentials, the argument is that economic planning cannot even be attempted in a parliamentary democracy, so power must gravitate into the hands of a small group of officials, and eventually into those of a single dictator. But against this must be set the fact that in his earliest essays socialism is attacked straightforwardly on economic grounds, without reference to totalitarianism, and also the fact that it is difficult to make sense of his later work from the anti-totalitarian perspective. For suppose your concern, say in about 1960, was to safeguard liberal democracy against the ideological threat of Soviet communism. Would it make sense to do so by denouncing the social democratic reforms that had taken place in the postwar years and insisting upon a return to the principles of classical economics? How could one fail to see the integrative functions of the welfare state, the extent to which it had served to channel working-class protest into forms compatible with liberal democracy? The only plausible way to explain Hayek's position is to impute to him a lifelong ideological commitment to certain economic doctrines, a commitment derived mainly from the work of his fellow Austrians Menger and Von Mises.

In saying this I do not wish to impugn Hayek's political liberalism, his commitment to

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personal freedoms of speech, movement, association, and the like. (He cared rather little for democracy proper, thinking that legislative authority should be placed in the hands of a tenured body of mature men and women, chosen on the grounds that they had "proved themselves in the ordinary business of life," but that is another matter.) But what he cared most deeply about was economic freedom, the freedom of the entrepreneur especially. We are now in a better position to understand his tactics in *The Road to Serfdom*. Confronted with an intellectual climate in which wartime experience seemed to demonstrate the virtues of government planning, but in which Fascism was almost universally execrated, the most effective way to attack planning was to link it with Fascism, to suggest that the *origins* of Nazism lay in the German intelligentsia's longstanding fascination with socialist ideas. Britain in 1944, Hayek suggested, bore many of the hallmarks of Germany twenty or thirty years previously. Only by returning to the principles of Cobden and Bright could the country avoid a slow drift into totalitarianism.

Having established a general vantage point from which to view Hayek's writings, I will now look more critically at his arguments against socialist policies of every kind. Hayek introduces a basic distinction between two modes of human association, which he calls "spontaneous orders" and "organizations." Spontaneous orders are patterns of interaction that emerge as the unintended consequences of human behavior. No one intends that a spontaneous order should emerge, and there is no directing will that gives it its shape. The best, and for Hayek the primary, example is a market economy, which displays certain regularities (for instance, the prices charged for any given commodity all tend to converge to the same figure) even though no one intends or decides that these regularities should exist. Price convergence occurs as a result of many separate individuals haggling with one another over the cost of particular items; once the pattern has emerged, people can use it to guide their behavior, knowing roughly what they may expect to pay for a certain commodity.

Organizations, by contrast, are set up by individuals with deliberate aims in mind. They are consciously structured in such a way as to best achieve those purposes, and so they must embody a system of authority to coordinate the behavior of all those who belong to them. Armies, bureaucracies, and firms are all examples of organizations in Hayek's sense. As the last example shows, organizations can exist *within* spontaneous orders without replacing them. But the central error of socialism, according to Hayek, is that it seeks to *replace* spontaneous order by organization—in its most extreme version to make the whole of society into a single organization with one directing will—thereby abandoning all of the distinctive virtues that spontaneous orders possess. Among these virtues, Hayek stresses the following two: first—this is his epistemological argument—spontaneous orders are able to make use of all the limited and local knowledge that is dispersed among their constituent members, whereas organizations can only use the knowledge that is capable of being collected by their directing center; second, spontaneous orders can accommodate individual diversity—people can pursue a whole range of different basic goals within the framework that a spontaneous order provides—whereas an organization must be guided by a single purpose, such as military success or profit maximization. If attempts are made to make society as such into an organization, this implies that a single scale of values must be imposed on every member by those holding central authority.

Hayek's concept of spontaneous order combines three ingredients: the idea that human actions, taken in the aggregate, have consequences that are neither intended nor foreseen; the idea that the outcome may nonetheless be an *order*, in the sense that it possesses a certain degree of stability and regularity; and the idea that this order has certain desirable properties that could not be obtained by conscious planning. (This last idea is really nothing more than an echo of Adam Smith's claim that the public interest is promoted better by everyone pursuing their own interests in the marketplace than by direct attempts to further it.) The idea of unintended consequences is relatively com-

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monplace. But why should we suppose that the ensuing outcome should be orderly and benign? It is easy enough to think of cases where the results of many individuals acting independently and without coordination are simply chaotic; and other cases where the results are predictable enough, but obviously bad for all concerned (we might call these "spontaneous disorders"). Everyone enjoys the convenience of shopping at the corner shop and would like it to continue; but everyone finds it a little cheaper to do their main weekly shopping at the out-of-town supermarket, and so the corner shop goes to the wall. Everyone finds it a little quicker to drive to work by car than to take the bus, but when all drive the highway is jammed and everyone ends up taking longer to make their journey. In how many areas of social life do we find spontaneous order, and how many areas do we find spontaneous disorder? Why expect one rather than the other?

The only well-developed body of theory supporting the spontaneous-order hypothesis is the neoclassical theory of the market, which explains how rational, profit-maximizing individuals will converge on a competitive equilibrium that is efficient in the minimal sense that no one's position can be further improved without someone else's being worsened. Hayek plays cat and mouse with this theory. He relies on it when he wants to emphasize the virtues of the free market; he is quick to distance himself from it whenever he confronts an advocate of economic planning who suggests that planners might be able to *simulate* the workings of markets for certain purposes. Hayek's economics then switches into "Austrian" mode, which very crudely means emphasizing uncertainty and economic change and the gaps this opens up for entrepreneurial leaps into the future. Austrian economics is in certain respects more realistic than neoclassical economics, but the price you pay for this realism is that it gives you no reason to think that market economies will tend toward a stable equilibrium. Indeed, it strongly suggests the reverse. If economic decisions are made by entrepreneurs acting on "local knowledge" and facing conditions of uncertainty where no one fully grasps the global environment in which they are acting, why not expect sudden lurches into this or that line of production followed by equally sudden switches into something else—precisely the "anarchy of the market" for which traditional socialists have always berated it? What, positively, is being said in favor of such a system? Austrian economics reminds me of those cartoon characters who walk off the edge of a cliff and keeping going straight on until they happen to look down and notice that the ground beneath them has disappeared. The trick is just not to look down.

So the idea of spontaneous order is in bad trouble. Neoclassical economics shows how *markets* can be spontaneous orders, but only if you make certain simplifying assumptions about how they work. Sometimes those assumptions are indeed approximately true, and then we can applaud, Adam Smith-style, the virtues of markets in getting our bread baked and our meat delivered. But even in markets the assumptions don't always hold, as the corner shop example shows, and besides there are large tracts of social life that no one, barring a few Chicago economists, has ever suggested trying to explain in quasi-market terms. So, to come back to the question I asked above, why expect "spontaneous order" rather than "spontaneous disorder" in all these areas?

There is another problem with Hayek's idea of spontaneous order. Spontaneous orders need ground rules. They may *generate* regularities of a more complex kind, but they need some common conventions to start with, so that people can interact with one another to mutual advantage. In the case of market economies, there needs to be a structure of legal rights, forms of contract to allow people to buy and sell items, a common currency, and so forth. The question arises, how is this framework to be instituted? Does it arise by conscious design, or might we regard the framework itself as a kind of second-level spontaneous order, something that emerges as the unintended consequence of individual actions?

Here we come across one of the deep tensions in Hayek's thinking. On the one hand, particularly in his earlier writings, he wants to

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say that a liberal order depends upon a well-designed framework, and that there is plenty of room for government "planning" in the sense of seeking to improve the regime of property rights, to regulate monopolies and cartels, and so forth, so as to improve the efficiency of the market economy. On the other hand, there is an increasing tendency in his later work to argue that the framework emerges spontaneously over time. Hayek argues, in quasi-Darwinian terms, that different social groups will adopt and act upon somewhat different sets of rules, that some of these groups will be more successful than others, and so the rules adopted by the successful groups will come to prevail as these groups expand and the less successful groups shrink. Experimentation over time will lead to steady improvement in the framework of the market. Here then "legislation" would have to mean the formal recognition of rules of behavior that had already been adopted informally by increasing numbers of people.

There are great difficulties with this second train of thought. To begin with, what is the unit of analysis supposed to be? Is it whole political communities, or groups of people within such communities? How are we to measure the relative success of groups following different sets of rules? Is the yardstick to be an economic one, or are we to use some more basic criterion still, such as population size? (Population seems to be Hayek's final resting place in *The Fatal Conceit*, but it is an exceedingly strange way to measure "success.") Furthermore there is an obvious fallacy involved in moving from the proposition that an individual's or a subgroup's chances can be improved by adopting a certain rule to the proposition that *everyone* will be better off if they adopt that same rule. Many rules are "successful" precisely because the groups who follow them benefit parasitically from others who behave differently (businesses who pay their bills late profit at the expense of more responsible firms, and so forth).

Finally, this Social Darwinian approach seems to lead to a counsel of passivity, in defiance of Hayek's own passionate defense of free-market liberalism. For if the framework of rules that makes social and economic life possible is itself to be regarded as a spontaneous order, evolving in ways that we neither intend nor foresee, then presumably it is wrong to intervene deliberately, whether in defense of a liberal framework or of some alternative. We should simply sit back and wait to see which of the many possible frameworks is most "successful" (however success is to be measured). The collapse of communism might give us reason to think that particular form had been proved less successful than capitalism, but there are several third alternatives that have not yet been tried, and we cannot say in advance that these will not turn out to be better still. Rather than committing ourselves dogmatically to a classical liberal framework, the evolutionary perspective suggests opening up the future to as many social experiments as possible.

Since Social Darwinism serves Hayek's purposes so badly, let us return to his earlier conviction that a society's constitution may be deliberately improved by reflection on the consequences of adopting different ground rules. We should allow spontaneous orders to flourish, but within a framework of rules that we modify by political means in the light of our general objectives. This appears immediately to raise two sets of questions. First, if we decide for Hayekian or other reasons that a market economy is one of the orders that we wish to promote, what should its ground rules be? What rights of property are people to have in goods of different kinds? In land? How are resources going to be allocated to people at the outset? Should we allow inheritance of wealth, or should we try to achieve an equal starting point by providing everyone with a capital grant on reaching the age of majority? Should incomes be taxed, and if so in accordance with what principles? There is nothing in the idea of spontaneous order itself that suggests answers to these questions; all that it requires is that having set the ground rules, we should allow individuals freely to pursue their own aims and objectives, thereby (we hope) generating for each person a stable set of expectations about the behavior of others.

Second, what values should guide us in answering the questions in the first list? Should

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we aim for an order that fosters the highest rate of economic growth? Or should we be concerned about personal liberty, about the extent to which different frameworks make it possible to pursue alternative plans of life, not necessarily involving the acquisition of economic goods? Yet again, how far should we be guided by considerations of equality in choosing a framework: ought we as far as possible to give people equal chances to pursue their goals, or should we allow inequalities that we expect to work to everyone's advantage? Hayek shies away from asking basic ethical questions of this kind, mainly I think because he is an ethical subjectivist. He does not believe that we can find general principles that everyone could endorse that would allow us to answer the questions I have just posed. When forced to offer a criterion by which we might judge the worth of a system of social rules, he suggests that the system should provide "the best chance for any member selected at random successfully to use his knowledge for his purposes." But although at first sight this might appear to sidestep the ethical question, by judging success in terms of how far each individual is able to pursue his goals whatever these might be, in fact a criterion is being applied, namely a version of utilitarianism with "purpose-fulfillment" standing in for happiness. And this criterion is no more and no less contentious than any other yardstick that we might use to judge the comparative worth of different economic systems.

Once we see that a market economy, or indeed any kind of spontaneous order, can be guided by different sets of ground rules, and that the choice of these rules unavoidably raises ethical questions, we are ready to assess Hayek's assaults on social justice and socialism. It is crucial to his argument that both of these projects should involve replacing the spontaneous order of the market by organization. Ideas of social justice, Hayek claims, only make sense if you think of society as a giant organization within which the benefits people receive are centrally determined. Only within such an organization do criteria of distribution such as merit and need have any concrete meaning. In a spontaneous order, the benefits that any particular individual enjoys are the unintended results of a host of uncoordinated decisions made by other individuals, and so their distribution cannot be regarded either as just or as unjust. So "social justice" is, for Hayek, an oxymoron: "justice" requires a distributing agent, but "society," to the extent that it retains the characteristics of a spontaneous order, cannot be such an agent.

But although ideas of distributive justice do have application within organizations, there is no reason to suppose that this is their only role. For such ideas can also be used to judge the ground rules of spontaneous orders such as the market. Indeed this seems to me precisely how ideas of social justice are applied most often in practice. Given a proposed change in the ground rules—say a proposal to limit the inheritance of wealth, or to require employers not to discriminate on grounds of race or sex, or to entitle everyone to a basic income independent of their economic performance, we ask how the aims of the proposal match up to our standards of justice, whether these be principles of desert, or need, or equality, or priority for the worst-off, or whatever. (I do not intend in this essay to recommend any particular standard; perhaps different standards apply in different social spheres.) We don't try to specify how any particular individual should fare; whether Bob or Carol should get the job, whether Tom's salary is a fair one, are not questions that our principles of social justice will answer for us, any more than we can say that it is fair or unfair that Jack should have won a particular race on a particular occasion. In both cases we want the ground rules to be just, and we want them to be applied consistently, but our principles are not fine-toothed enough to allow us to make judgments about individuals.

Hayek's attempt to jettison the whole idea of social justice by tying distributive justice exclusively to organizations seems pretty unconvincing. What, now, about socialism? Ought we to regard the socialist project as essentially one of replacing spontaneous order by organization, as Hayek suggests? Here, I

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think, his view is better grounded. Especially at the time when his social philosophy was crystallizing, in the 1930s, the association between socialism and planning was very strong. Although socialists disagreed among themselves about the form that planning should take, no one disputed that the transition from capitalism to socialism was, at least in part, a transition from market competition to social planning. A broader historical view would suggest a different picture, but Hayek cannot be blamed for entering the debate on the terms set by his socialist contemporaries. Where he can be faulted is for adhering rigidly to his interpretation in the face of mounting evidence to the contrary. Hayek seems never to have acknowledged that there might be forms of socialism in which central planning would play little or no part: for instance, a libertarian variant of market socialism in which, starting from an equal division of resources, individuals are left free to exchange and contract with one another as they wish; or decentralized communitarian socialism of the kind now favored by a section of the Green movement. Perhaps these proposals are no more than pipe dreams: but this needs to be demonstrated empirically, not simply preempted by identifying socialism with the centrally planned economy.

Hayek's position on this question is curious, because in his essays of the 1930s he considered with a degree of sympathy the original "market socialism" of Lange, Taylor, Dickinson and other economists of the period. Roughly speaking, under this model wages and the prices of consumer goods would be set by the market, the planning board would fix the prices of capital goods by trial and error, and industry managers (who would be public employees) would be instructed to produce in such a way as to equate marginal cost with price. Hayek has a number of criticisms to make of this model, the most powerful of which is perhaps that it creates no incentives for entrepreneurship and would therefore in all probability discourage technical innovation, but he by no means dismisses it out of hand, and indeed anticipates "fruitful further discussion" with socialists in this camp. (Of Dickinson's *Economics of Socialism* he says that it "provides the rare pleasure of feeling that recent advances of economic theory have not been in vain and have even helped to reduce political differences to points which can be rationally discussed.") It is curious, then, that in his later years Hayek should have failed to consider versions of market socialism, and other alternative socialist models, that reduced the role of the planning authorities yet further. He relapsed into a crude identification of socialism with Soviet-style central planning, even though, in the West at any rate, there were very few actual socialists who continued to accept that equation.

We can only make sense of this by returning to Hayek's Manichaean worldview, which, as I remarked earlier, appears to have become still more pronounced with advancing age. If you see the world as a battleground between two antagonistic philosophies, expressing themselves in two diametrically opposed visions of social order, then anything that appears to stand in the middle must turn out, on closer inspection, to be a fifth column. Reformist schemes of social justice, or socialist proposals that involve modifying rather than abolishing the market economy, are never to be trusted. Once embarked upon, they lead inexorably to a destination where the state has assumed complete control over social life and individual freedom is at an end. So there is no need to investigate such proposals on their own merits. Since they are *implicitly* totalitarian they can be dismissed without further ado.

Hayek was that odd creature, a dogmatist who announced himself as a skeptic. As we have seen, he found his intellectual ancestors among the skeptical empiricists and especially those in the British tradition. But his thinking in fact remained profoundly alien to that tradition. He had none of that genuine skepticism that can be found, for example, in David Hume, which issued in political moderation, an attachment to tradition coupled with an openness to changes that could be shown to work empirically. A Humean might be skeptical in advance of a proposed change, say about the prospect of a welfare state, but once it was

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in place, and could be shown to serve certain human needs, he or she would find nothing to object to in it. It is not like that with Hayek. Welfare states, at least those founded on ideas of social justice, and going beyond the provision of a minimal safety net, were wrong in principle. His skepticism was applied exclusively to the arguments of the other side. He never appears to have doubted for a moment that the free-market economy could be proved to be the best form of social order. (He could reconcile this with his Social Darwinism only by assuming that the free market had, in fact, triumphed historically in competition with other social orders.) Dogmatists in skeptics' clothing are hard to deal with, because they may go to considerable lengths to conceal the challengeable assumptions and principles that ground their views of the world. That, together with the sheer intellectual stamina that I commented upon at the beginning of this essay, may help us understand Hayek's success in influencing the political thinking of our time. □

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Mitchell Cohen

POLITICS AT THE OPERA

Prelude

In Brussels, in August 1830, the revolution began at the opera. It was William I's birthday and the fifteenth anniversary of this Dutch king's rule over Belgium, a spoil of the Congress of Vienna. The evening was to crown three days of celebration—or so it was intended.

Surely the choice of opera was unwise. Auber's *La Muette de Portici* tells of the 1647 uprising of Neapolitans, especially the lower classes, against the Spanish (who had been previous rulers of Belgium, too). At one point the fisherman-insurrectionist Masaniello sings a duet with a comrade: "*Amour sacré de la patrie/ Rends-nous l'audace et la fierté*" — "Sacred love of homeland/Give us audacity and boldness." Reports of what followed are contradictory and not always reliable. Agitators, it seems, were in the theater and in the crowd outside in the Place de la Monnaie. Here's a description written some years later:

> The patriotic ideas alluded to so often in passages of *La Muette* echoed in all corners. The artist singing that beautiful song *Amour sacré de la patrie* was astonished by the enthusiastic welcome and the fact that he was being accompanied [by spectators—MC]. These notes were repeated in chorus by the throng in the public square outside which keenly felt the impressions coming from the hall.

Presently, everyone seemed to be pouring into the torch-lit plaza; the offices of the government newspaper were quickly aflame, and demonstrators set fire to the home of the Dutch Minister of Justice, too. Soon enough, Belgium was an independent land.[1] Perhaps the authorities should have been more alarmed by posters around town proposing an alteration in the king's festive plans: "Monday, the 23rd, fireworks; Tuesday, the 24th, illuminations; Wednesday; the 25th, revolution."

Operas, of course, do not make revolutions. The Belgian tinderbox may have been ignited by a combination of sharps and flats and voices and words, but it was hardly fashioned by them—in fact, Auber was apolitical and only composed *La Muette* (in 1828) at the urging of his librettists to prove that, in contrast to his past work, he could write on serious themes. Still, the Brussels events raise perennial questions about the relation between politics and culture. Recall Stendhal's comment, quoted by Irving Howe in *Politics and the Novel*: "Politics in a work of literature is like a pistol-shot in the middle of a concert, something loud and vulgar and yet a thing to which it is not possible to refuse one's attention." Stendhal implied that aesthetic properties are vitiated when engaged by politics, by ideologies, by the roughhouse of power, coercion, violence. Such can be the case but, as Howe showed in literature, it isn't necessarily so. The same may be said of opera—indeed, some of the greatest operas have political or social settings. Howe asked, "Once the pistol is fired, what happens to the music?" We may extend the query: what happens when the music is, well, music. With lyrics.

"The imaginative function of music in drama and that of poetry in drama are fundamentally the same," writes Joseph Kerman in *Opera as Drama*. "Each art has the final responsibility for the success of the drama, for it is within their capacity to define the response of characters to deed and situations. Like poetry, music can reveal the *quality* of action, and thus determine dramatic form in the most serious sense." The phrase "final responsibility" is

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critical here, for if, as Kerman puts it, "music articulates the drama," the drama must also be worth articulating. True, many operas were written solely for their music and the beauty of the human voice, rather than as vehicles of substantive meaning. On the other hand, enjoying the music of *Das Rhinegold*, say, without knowing that Alberich the dwarf, in stealing the gold from the Rhine maidens, forgoes love for power, is necessarily an impoverished appreciation of Wagner's opera.

Many operas permit different levels of appreciation. Watching *The Magic Flute*, a child will marvel at a tuneful fairy story about Pamino, Tamino, Sarastro, and the Queen of the Night. An adult who knows neither the libretto nor German could simply relish Mozart's music. Another observer might, however, find it a gloss on the fate of the Enlightenment in Joseph II's Vienna. While this third observer would still be viewing a musical spectacle in fairy-tale form, its content would be perceived as an aesthetically shaped expression of ideas and of a society. (This is the theme of Nicholas Till's fine study, *Mozart and the Enlightenment*).

If, as a consequence of the opera, the third observer reflects upon ideas or society, reflection is bound to sensory experience, not to pure intellect. Indeed, Mozart believed that "in an opera, poetry must be altogether the obedient daughter of music." So an interesting problem arises for political opera: does its sensory—that is, aesthetic—medium lead the intellect to a more or to a less intelligent understanding of politics? And since politics does not occur in fairy lands, another question inevitably ensues: what is the relation between such "understanding" and "reality"? While the influence of Maupassant and Zola in the late nineteenth century engendered "*verismo*" (truth)—the treatment of naturalistic and realistic themes in works such as *Carmen* and *La Bohème*—it would seem that opera, by its nature, resists realism and naturalism. In the real world, Feruccio Busoni once observed, people don't communicate through versified song accompanied by orchestras. Music, in other words, necessarily produces an alienation effect. But here we run into problems. When Brecht used music (among other techniques) to alienate, his purpose was to prevent the audience from empathizing with particular characters by reminding it that it was viewing actors on stage, not "reality." Reflective engagement with the issues raised by the spectacle would allow realistic understanding. Music was deployed to enhance the intellect, and this, in turn, was meant to generate political engagement. That hardly defines what happened in Brussels. Due to a combination of melody and words and circumstances—the posters around town and the agitators in the theater indicate that things were not entirely spontaneous, as scholars have noted—an empathetic chord was struck, so to speak, leading to direct action.

Music, wrote Stendhal in his *Life of Rossini*, appeals "to the spirit of man by conjuring up a pattern of imaginative imagery, which in some way corresponds to the passions by which the listener is already swayed." In contrast, Anthony Arblaster, in his recent study of politics in opera, *Viva la Libertà*, proposes that music itself may bear political meaning. He cites "Va Pensiero," the chorus of the Hebrew exiles in Verdi's *Nabucco*, which became an anthem of the Risorgimento. Although an untutored listener might not be able to specify who was singing about what, "the long unison line of the vocal melody would be enough in itself . . . to tell us that this is the voice of a group lamenting its own collective plight, not mourning the death of a king or an individual." It's an interesting claim, but consider: "Va Pensiero" has of late been adopted by the racists of the French National Front. What was composed as a song of the oppressed by a great liberal humanist is now a musical bond for aspiring oppressors.

It seems that the public impact of music—its emotional power—is appreciated across the political spectrum as an aesthetic communal experience. Indeed, the invention of opera, around the turn of the sixteenth century, came from a conscious attempt to reinvent ancient Greek music and its role in theater. Circles of poets, musicians, and critics, most famously the Florentine "Camerata," believed that in

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Hellas was realized the appropriate relation between words and music, the former conditioning the latter. But while Attic theater was woven into the civic fabric of the citizenry—and spoke its language—opera has an uneven historical relation to populism and democracy. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries its estate shifted from the nobility to the middle classes. Nowadays opera is inaccessible to many (even in the middle classes) either because of its expense or its language (a fact modified by the increasing use of supertitles). Donald Jay Grout, in his *Short History of Opera,* calls it a "visible and audible projection of the power, wealth and taste of the society that supports it."[2] Still, this doesn't always have conservative implications. In nineteenth-century Italy the opera house was perhaps the central cultural institution for many Italians, and in the era of the Risorgimento, it inevitably became political. Verdi's "imaginative imagery," to use Stendhal's terms, clearly corresponded to the passions of his listeners. Consider the premiere of his *La Battaglia di Legnano*, which tells of the victory of the Lombards over Friedrich Barbossa in the twelfth century. In 1849 Republicans overthrew (temporarily) Papal authority and while Mazzini (himself the author of a book on the philosophy of music), Garibaldi, and their supporters armed themselves in Rome, Verdi conducted an opera there whose medieval protagonists, instead of proclaiming loyalty to their native towns as would have been the case in the Middle Ages, cried "Italia!"—it is the work of a modern nationalist.[3] (When Verdi learned of the defeat of papal armies in 1860 by Garibaldi and Cialdini, he proclaimed, somewhat altering the aesthetic questions posed by Stendhal's pistol-shot-in-the-concert, "Those are composers. And what operas! What finales! To the sound of guns!")

But from a political viewpoint—ignoring aesthetic questions—what is implied when music, appealing to the emotions of an audience, intends to eclipse the intellect? My point is not that one should respond to music solely on an intellectual level—a silly proposition. But, but, but . . . . Here we turn to Wagner, that artistic genius and human wretch, to see just how difficult the matter can become.

Wagner too looked back to the intimate relation between the Greeks and their theater—his *Gesamtkunstwerk* (total work of art) aimed to restore the organic links among music, poetry, and dance, fragmented like humanity in the post-Attic world. He conceived *das Volk*—"necessity's vicegerent in the flesh"—as the source of the "artwork of the future" in which "we shall all be one." Of course Wagner assumed that his operas would bring about this "one," and the aim of his artwork was not the articulation of drama through music but the "*emotionalizing of the intellect.*" In drama "we must become *knowers* through *the feeling.*" And for all of his efforts to impart philosophical wisdom in his operas, it was through melody that Wagner believed that "the poet's thought becomes an instinctively enthralling moment of feeling." Music, he wrote, "cannot think"; rather it can "materialize thoughts" or "give forth their emotional contents." Thought dissolves into emotion by means of music, and this makes the artist, the artwork, and *das Volk* "one." If such notions are not sufficiently rattling, one needs only to recall that at the Bayreuth Festival in 1924—the first after the Great War—following Hans Sachs's celebrated declamation on German culture at the end of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, the audience didn't quite pour into the streets as happened in Brussels in 1830; it arose with shouts of "*Heil!*" and sang "*Deutschland über Alles.*" The revolution came later and proclaimed Wagner its cultural harbinger.

Act I

As the struggle for German unification moved toward a climax in the 1860s, Wagner, a man not given to modesty, proposed in his diaries: "I am the German spirit." The composer imagined that the age crystallized in his being and his operas, and there is truth in this; his frenzied, possessed persona was easily assimilable to the disorder of the times and the times to his persona. What crystallized, however, was not a synthetic whole, at least not conceptually; aiming to emotionalize the intel-

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lect, Wagner's *Geist* was not Hegel's. Its products have been cause for endless controversy. Interpretations range from Shaw's *The Perfect Wagnerite*, which sees *The Ring*—or most of it—as an anticapitalist allegory born of Wagner's early anarchist politics (with Bakunin, he played an active role in the 1849 Dresden uprising) to Robert Donnington's view of the tetralogy as the incarnation of Jungian archetypes.

Perhaps the most contentious matter remains Wagner's relation to Nazism. His elevation, sixty years after his death, to Nazi icon rested both on the Führer's love of his operas and on Wagner's copious writings, which are filled with prattling about "*das Volk*" and venomous anti-Semitism. Wagner's notorious essay, "Judaism in Music" (1850), held that it was not Jews but Germans who needed emancipation—from rootless Jews. The latter, not embedded naturally and by language in the *Volk*, had come to dominate commerce-obsessed Western society.

There was, indeed, nothing pleasant about him. Rather like the Third Reich, Wagner believed everyone and everything existed for—or as an obstacle to—his will, to be disposed of as need be. "If you are really to develop your full stature you will have, I think, to suffer and make others suffer, in ways which are totally strange to you at present and against every conscious value you have." Had W.H. Auden written these words to Wagner instead of to Benjamin Britten, Wagner would not have been fazed, for not only was suffering part of his self-image—such, *ach!*, is the fate of unappreciated genius—but he hadn't the least compunction about making others suffer on his behalf. He expected it of them.

As to values, few have equaled him in hating—today the Jews, tomorrow the French, Jesuits the day after, next week someone else—while proclaiming love his supreme value. Such behavior, it seems, was inscribed in his being. Even after embracing Schopenhauerian resignation as the only comportment appropriate to a meaningless world, Wagner had to be immersed in luxury, as Barry Millington notes in his admirable study *Wagner*.[4] The meaningless world was there to serve him: "I am a different kind of organism, my nerves are hypersensitive, I must have beauty, splendor and light! The world owes me what I need." This from a composer who believed great art is born of the *Volk*.

But then this was a man whose "humor" included writing a "comedy" about suffering Parisians during the siege of 1870 ("*Ein Kapitulation*"); who joked that Jewry should be burned publicly at the end of a performance of Lessing's *Nathan the Wise*; who thought that "a human being who is born black, urged towards the heights, becomes white and at the same time a different creature;" and who imputed criticisms of him by Nietzsche to the fact that the latter masturbated too often. One is tempted to propose that were Stendhal's pistol shot to ring out at a performance in Bayreuth, the appropriate target would have been the composer.

Save for one fact: he was, indeed, an artistic titan, and wrote some of the most sublime music we have. That, of course, is the problem.

Well, not for everyone. It doesn't seem to concern Paul Lawrence Rose, the author of the latest contribution to Wagner controversalia, *Wagner: Race and Revolution*.[5] For him, Wagner's opus raises but one question—"revolutionary anti-semitism." When it was published last year, this slim volume occasioned considerable uproar. It was debated publicly at the New York Wagner Society, and reviews ranged from the banal to the insidious. "If you believe Wagner was an unredeemed, virulent antisemite," this book is for you, opined the editor of *Opera News*, Patrick J. Smith, whose aesthetic posture was apparently upset by a reminder of the sort of fellow Wagner was. (He provides no evidence that Wagner ever repented; there isn't any.) And then there is Edward Said, whose review of Rose in the *London Review of Books* served as a pretext for Israel-baiting. The result was a disputation that extended over several issues in which Said, Rose, and others shed more light on themselves than on Wagner. I shall return to these tantrums in due course—they occurred

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against the backdrop of Israelis quarreling, as they do every few years, about whether to allow Wagner to be performed in the Jewish state. Let's look at Rose's book first; the starkness of its contentions and the relentless tendentiousness of its arguments make it a convenient means by which to approach an array of questions.

Forceful arguments have long been made that Wagner's prejudices informed his art. Rose, who is stingy in crediting predecessors, goes much further: "Hatred of Jewishness is the hidden agenda of virtually all the operas." Yet if Rose has thought about opera, not to mention aesthetics, one finds no evidence of this in his pages. This is not to say that all of his claims are flawed. He seeks to show, contrary to popular views, that Wagner did not transform from pre-1848 liberal into post-1849 racist. The composer's prejudices, though radicalized by 1850, originated before the revolutionary upheavals, primarily in conflicts with and jealousy of Giacomo Meyerbeer, the German-Jewish grand opera composer who dominated European and especially the Paris opera in the mid-nineteenth century. Here, Rose seems persuasive. But then he elaborates: Wagner's life and art can be grasped only in light of what he calls "the German revolutionary tradition," which apparently includes virtually everybody but Hegel. It fuses revolutionism and anti-Semitism, the latter decisively shaping the former. It is a "modern prejudice," Rose warns, to see "revolution" and "race" as mutually exclusive, the one liberal and progressive, the other right wing. By 1848 Wagner "conceived a cogent revolutionary ideology" that would "satisfy him emotionally and intellectually for the rest of his life." It provided "a rigorous scheme for his random anti-semitism." Later, by the 1870s, he attained "a new ideological rigor in his revolutionary anti-semitism." The combined influence of Darwin and Gobineau generated biological racism.

Yet having characterized Wagner as "rigorous," Rose tells us also that "the political and artistic elements of the German Revolution may be formally distinguishable but in the realm of sensibility as well as the world of practice, these elements tend to blur into one another." He adds that "the crucial characteristic [of] Wagner's and indeed the prevailing German concept of 'Jews' is that it is a plastic, fluid notion that can often change meaning seamlessly without the consciousness or intention of the writer or thinker. In German revolutionary thought, the revolution and the Jews are thus nebulous, almost mystical symbols."

How is cogent thought also plastic, fluid, nebulous, and imprecise? How does a rigorous scheme seamlessly change meaning? With ease if your historical method borders on free association, which seems to be the case with Rose. He tells us, for instance, that "Wagner's whole personal love-life with its several appropriations of other people's wives, taken together with the frequent parallel adulteries in the operas, suggests that he felt the commandment against adultery to be especially irksome and considered it a Jewish imposition on German society that needed to be replaced by a code of conduct based on freedom and love."

At first glance, this appears ludicrous. After all, some of us might suspect that had there been no biblical injunction against coveting his neighbor's wife, Richard ("I am a different kind of organism") Wagner still might not have been a model husband and faithful friend. At second glance, one recognizes that there is, if not a method to Rose's silliness, an ideological agenda: implicating the left in anti-Semitism. His ardor aside, this is hardly an original point; there are scores of works on left-wing anti-Semitism. True, few claim, like Rose, that "in the context of nineteenth-century German revolutionary thought, any allegory of capitalism must imply an antagonism to Judaism as both the spirit and the practice of modern bourgeois capitalism." But then some people think that however often Judaism was conflated with capitalism by bigots in nineteenth century Germany, it was also possible to criticize capitalism on account of capitalism.

Moreover, no serious treatment of the history of ideas would subsume under the same "revolutionism" thinkers as diverse as Kant, an Enlightenment optimist and idealist who demanded that each individual be treated as an end in himself; Feuerbach, the radical materialist who declared "you are what you eat"; and Schopenhauer, who espoused pessimism and an irrationalist metaphysics resting on the "nothing-

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ness" of the world. If Wagner used the word "revolution" indiscriminately, that doesn't mean that someone writing about him should do so too, for the consequence is that neither the rabid genius nor anti-Semitism receive their just deserts. Rose's "method" simply impedes posing the essential question: why was Jew-hatred a constant among so many thinkers with significantly different—and often opposed—structures of thought? No answer is provided by suggesting that because Wagner was a bigot who called himself a "revolutionary," each sharp and flat in his work dissolves into Zyklon B.

Indeed, Wagner's own pronouncements on "revolution" were hardly consistent. After 1849, he wrote in various letters that he couldn't be a true revolutionary because he didn't possess the reckless destructive willpower characteristic only of "the scum of the common people." At other times he sounds not only "revolutionary" but like the very embodiment of destructive willpower. Nor is it just a matter of "revolution": at virtually any point of Wagner's life one can show him espousing opposing notions. If one cites him chattering about the *Volk*, one can also quote him speaking as a universalist. If Wagner's revolutionary racism became a "cogent" synthesis between 1847–50, he also distinguished, in "The Art-Work of the Future" (1849), between "the *racial-national* and the *unnational universal*" stages in human development, proposing that the former was at its end and that the latter represented the future. As he initially conceived *The Ring* in 1849, Brünnhilde, its heroine, was to lead her love, Siegfried, to Valhalla where they would exult with the gods; within two years she bears "blessed death-redemption" to the divinities.[5] And consider *The Ring's* finale, *Götterdämmerung*. Why, asked August Röckel, Wagner's Dresden comrade, had the composer concluded with apocalypse since the gold, whose theft precipitates the events of the operas, is returned to its owners, the Rhine Maidens? Wagner could provide no coherent answer, save that it was explained through feeling, that is, through the music.

And that is just it. It is not in the ideational realm that Wagner is lucid; his notions are often as ill-digested as they are passionately advocated. Wagner, as Bernard Shaw remarked, "was not a Schopenhauerite every day in the week, not even a Wagnerite. His mind changes as often as his mood." Wagner seems to have had entirely contradictory moods at the same time: he wrote *Rienzi* and *The Flying Dutchman* concurrently, and they are radically different types of opera. The cogency of Wagner, who aimed to emotionalize the intellect, is musical and not rational.

Rigor did not characterize his mind for his mind projected in myths. Adorno was right when he said that "Wagner makes the case for myth, but accuses it through his creation." One might locate the real ideological turning point in Wagner's life when he turned from the idea of an opera about Friedrich Barbossa—a historical subject—to the myths of the Nibelungen. Notably, plans for the Friedrich opera seem to have held his attention when he was closest to historical events (1848–49); he turned from history after the defeat of the revolution.[7] He only set one mature opera in a real time and place—*Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*—and sixteenth-century Nürnberg (Nuremburg) was also a myth for him, both of the future and the past. "Do you know what this strange old town of Nürnberg now means to me," Wagner wrote to Ludwig II, "it is the abode of the 'artwork of the future.' "

Truth, human reality, was not in history: "the incomparable thing about the *mythos* is that it is true for all time, and its content, how close soever its compression, is inexhaustible throughout the ages." He turned from Friedrich when he perceived him to be "a historical rebirth of the old pagan Siegfried." Probing Germanic mythology, Wagner found "no longer the figure of conventional history, whose garment claims our interest more than does the actual shape inside; but the real naked man, in whom I might spy each throbbing of his impulses, each stir within his mighty muscles, in uncramped freest motion: the type of the true *human being*."

When Rousseau wrote about natural man, he recognized that humans had changed too fundamentally to return, as he put it in a celebrated footnote, to a state of nature with the

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bears; Wagner perceives natural man in myth, and all history, a realm of garments, hasn't changed the "true human being" beneath; the actual history of human beings is secondary to the myth of their essence. So too must all the twists, turns, changes, inconsistencies of human history be secondary—including the inconsistencies of Richard Wagner. Rose is right to say Wagner sought to link "revolution" to Germanic myth, but again he fails to pose the interesting question: if myth is eternal, why "revolution"?

Act II

For all his bombastic declamations, and whatever his role in Dresden in 1849, Wagner's only real revolution was artistic. It consisted in the way he related sounds, ideas, and words in "music dramas." He did this through development of the *Motiv* (a musical theme associated with a character or an idea or a feeling); through his displacement of enclosed musical forms (for example, a self-contained aria) by "infinite melody," that is, meaningful musical continuity and direction throughout the work ("The art of composition is the art of transition," he wrote); and through his effort to transcend the perennial debate on the importance of music versus words, through *Sprechgesang*, a blending of dramatic speech and orchestration that goes beyond traditional "accompaniment."

The key, Millington writes, is a "musico-poetic synthesis—that is, the blending of melody and the spoken word into a line that liberated music in order to proclaim the drama instead of being constricted in regular patterns and predetermined forms." This is how Wagner attains (which isn't to say he always sustains) coherence. To uphold his thesis about revolutionism, Rose needs to demonstrate a structural homology between Wagner's music dramas and his politics. This would entail exploring the structures by which Wagner sought to transform operatic form and then asking: do they parallel those of his political imagination? Take, for example, the *Motiv*. Wagner developed it in order to break radically from past operatic models, *but as a musical means it emphasizes continuity*. Is not continuity crucial for a nationalist writing works derived from archaic sources—Germanic and Nordic mythology—which he believed held truth for the present day, indeed all times? As Benedict Anderson has noted in his trenchant study *Imagined Communities*, nations are objectively modern, but for nationalists they are subjectively ancient; the *Motiv* seems a musical means well-suited to this incongruity—a means deployed with radical intent that enhances continuity. Indeed, Wagner's music imposes coherence on what is often irrational and contradictory. And even mediocre: it is remarkable that the concluding opera of *The Ring* turns on Siegfried—whom Wagner described as the man of the future, "the most perfect human being"—drinking a magic potion. Given the philosophical ambitions of his tetralogy, Wagner could surely have fashioned something better.

Wagner's contradictions become manifest if we (1) contrast the internal structures of *Siegfried* and *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*, operas central to all commentaries on the political implications of his work, and (2) consider how these works suit Wagner's Schopenhauerianism. A crucial moment in *Siegfried*, the third *Ring* opera, occurs when the title character meets the Wanderer. The latter is really Wotan, his grandfather, King of the Gods, on whose staff the law is inscribed. Previously, Siegfried's father died in combat after Wotan withdrew protection from "Nothung" (Need), his sword. Wotan's goddess-wife had persuaded him that a hero must defend himself with his own sword, not one endowed by higher authority—unless that authority (Wotan) is prepared to relinquish power. Yet now Siegfried has, from the splinters of Nothung, forged his own sword. With it he shatters Wotan's staff—a revolutionary act allowing the new to supersede past authority.

But how does this square with Wagner's embrace of Schopenhauer? Reading Schopenhauer was " a second conversion experience" for Wagner, writes Rose. It resulted in "a new moral philosophical understanding of revolution." Notably, Schopenhauser's philosophy

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was "based on the promise of a revolutionary liberation from the shackles of a soul-corroding Jewish 'optimism.' " But if we turn to Wagner himself, we find that it is not "Jewish" but "Greek" optimism that is the issue for him, as for so many Romantics. In a letter to Röckel in 1856, he explained that *The Ring* initially took shape "at a time"—he refers to the heady year of 1849—"when with my ideas, I had built up an optimistic world, on Hellenic principles; believing that in order to realize such a world, it was only necessary for man to wish it." However, as he wrote operas demonstrating how evil arose, he intuited "the very essence and meaning of the world itself in all its possible phases, and had realized its nothingness."

What does it mean for a "revolutionary" to agree with Schopenhauer that human existence is meaningless, that the only alternative to relentless worldly pain is pessimistic acceptance of nothingness and retreat into Buddhist-like Nirvana? One can, of course, speak of strictly "spiritual" or "metaphysical" revolutions leading to resignation, but this is hardly the same thing as the optimism of the barricades, say in 1849. More likely, Schopenhauer provided an intellectual lodestar for Wagner's growing pessimism after the failure of 1849 disrupted his career, a pessimism finally articulated in the cataclysmic finale of *The Ring*, encompassing the death of Siegfried, "the man of the future."

Now, compare the alternately revolutionary and pessimistic aspects of *The Ring* with the structure of *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*. The internal structure of the latter expresses a consciousness that is in fact reformist, not revolutionary. Act III begins just after the citizens of Nürnberg have run riot. The artisan (cobbler) Mastersinger Sachs bemoans the anarchy: *"Wahn! Wahn!/Überall Wahn!" Wahn,* one of Wagner's favorite words, is ambiguous in German: it can mean illusion, madness, or obsession. Sachs sees it *Überall* (everywhere), and, wanting stability, he recognizes that order requires change and not inflexibility.

The opposition between the old and the new—Wotan and Siegfried in *The Ring*—is played out between Beckmesser and Walthar in *Meistersinger*. The former, the rigid town clerk and "marker" (scorer) for the guild of Mastersingers, is a being of rules and structure. The latter is a youthful Franconian knight who seeks victory in Nürnberg's song contest so as to gain admission to the guild and the hand of Eva (for whom Beckmesser also longs); he embodies change and impulse. In the end Walthar triumphs but, jaded, he at first refuses *Meister* status ("I will be happy without Masterhood"). Sachs persuades him that old and new must be mediated. This, indeed, has been the task of Sachs himself, for it is he who taught Walthar the musical necessities permitting him to produce the Prize Song. New doesn't vanquish old with the stroke of a sword named Need, but old and new are mediated. The result is renewal through reform in which authority modified is authority accepted. Wagner, in *Meistersinger* and *Siegfried*, expressed two minds at odds with one another; there is no evidence that he recognized this or the inconsistency of both these minds with Schopenhauerian resignation. But certainly *we* can recognize that it is impossible to contend that Siegfried the revolutionary, Schopenhauerian resignation, and the reformism of *Meistersinger* all constitute a single "revolutionary" vision.

Act III

When Rose cites anti-Semitic themes in the operas, they are linked to three major strains: law, redemption, and money. Indeed, whenever an issue of law appears in a libretto, Wagner, in Rose's eyes, is chastising Jews. When Wotan punishes Brünnhilde for disobeying him in *Die Walküre*, Wotan is on "the side of perverted Jewish legalism" and embodies bourgeois rulership. The "subtext" of *The Flying Dutchman* is "money-Judaism"; the phantom ship finds harbor in a coastal town in which "the villagers' pursuit of money is an expression of the essential Jewishness of bourgeois society." Although Wagner's prose writings certainly confirm his attachment to such anti-Semitic motifs, there is, at least as far as I can see, no justification in the operas for

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Rose's assertions here except the leap of an imagination that seems to leap a great deal. In any event, what makes these themes "revolutionary"? The identification of Judaism with money and grubby practicality, and the opposition of love and redemption to enslavement to law are among the oldest anti-Semitic motifs. They are based on—or, in Wagner's case, are secularizations of—traditional Christian notions.

What was radically new in nineteenth-century German anti-Semitism was the transformation of medieval religiously based Jew-hatred into a racial-nationalist doctrine; the former allowed for conversion and assimilation (at least in principle) and the latter precluded it. Wagner expressed a mélange of both. Sometimes he complained that, with capitalism's triumph, the moneychangers of yore had become dominant; in any event, "The Jewish race," he believed, is "the born enemy of pure humanity." Yet elsewhere he predicted that the era of races was over. As a consequence, he contended a year before his death that "all that can now make an impact is—as I have ventured to express it [in *Parsifal*, his last opera—MC]—the blood of Christ." It seems to me that Dieter Borchmeyer is correct to assert that Wagner captured a transitional moment between passing and future forms of Jew-hatred.[8] His anti-Semitism was an ill-digested mixture of old and new driven by his own inferiority complexes, egoistic jealousies, and endless obsessions (which included the fear—unjustified, it turns out—that he was partly of Jewish descent). Moreover, his prejudicial mélange parallels that of his political and philosophical ranting. Wagner's skewed worldview was that of a romantic anticapitalist, someone in rebellion against the fast-changing, industrializing world around him, but not on behalf of a future vision of a revolutionary modern rational industrial society. His future looked backward: to the Hellenic world; to Nordic/Germanic myths; to the Middle Ages. When Wagner rebelled against modernity, he also rebelled against history. He believed in the truth of myth alone; hence he would not have recognized that his own politics were modern and antimodern at once. He embraced nationalism—a modern concept—while rejecting the modern state.

The point is not to deny the radicalism, much less the prejudice, of Wagner. It is to dissent from construing him teleologically, as a synthetic moment in a "revolutionary tradition." It is only Wagner's musical brilliance—his use of *Motiv*, "infinite melody," *Sprechgesang*, all of them unifying forms—that makes him appear cogent, that yields wholeness, that indeed gives him such uncommon power. But it is a strictly aesthetic power that orders a mental kaleidoscope of romanticism, revolutionism, archaism, modernism, universalism, chauvinism, irrationalism, cruelty, profundity, insipidity. He is an apostle and genius of falsifying totality. Wagner may have imagined himself the visionary of the artwork and the *Volk* of the future, but in a time of rapid socioeconomic transformation, his eyes were fixed on and his spirit animated by ancient myths. These, he presumed, embody eternal verities, all of which somehow allowed him anchors in a world—a country—in motion.

Philip Rahv once used Trotsky's theory of combined and uneven development—the notion that an epoch may contain variant but interactive historical and socioeconomic structures (for example, feudal and capitalist)—to explain how Dostoyevsky's novels could be "radical in sensibility and subversive in performance" despite their author's reactionary beliefs. Without reducing Wagner's art to a simple function of his times, one way of understanding his worldview is as an instantiation of Germany's combined and uneven development, with its feudal-bourgeois mixture. There is, of course, a caveat: Trotsky aimed to explain the possibility of socialist revolution in "backwards" lands rather than advanced industrial societies; he assumed "progress" came with modern "development." Obviously, this wasn't the German case, and Wagner could accept no such judgment of modernity. Wagner's vision did not synthesize revolutionism and racism for the simple reason that it was cross-eyed. Save when it linked words to music.

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Act IV

This cross-eyed composer, this hate-filled man who preached redemption through love—are his prejudices indeed embedded in his operas? Some critics insist: he was too much the artist to despoil his art with such boorishness. The problem is that vitriolic anti-Semitism was a *Motiv* of his life; could his life's work have eluded it? Adorno argued that several of the operas are indeed racially loaded, even if none of the characters are overt stereotypes. In *My Life*, "Judaism in Music," and other writings Wagner presented caricatures of "Jewish" speech, music, and personal characteristics and these mark the characters of Beckmesser in *Meistersinger* and Alberich, Mime, and Hagan in *The Ring*. Adorno proposed that there was a structural parallel between the sadistic and humiliating humor deployed by Wagner in presenting these characters and his personal treatment of Jews like Hermann Levi, conductor of the first production of *Parsifal*.[9] More recently, Millington has made an erudite and impressive case against Beckmesser in the *Cambridge Opera Journal*.

Thus, even without Rose, the evidence is substantial, if arguable, that Wagner, consciously or not, vented his bigotry in fashioning some of his vilest characters. Of course, none of these characters need be played as Jews, subtly or explicitly, and the operas are in no way dependent on such a portrayal. Alberich can be played as a venal, sniveling, power-hungry capitalist with no Jewish characteristics whatsoever—in contrast, say, to Shylock, who can be nothing other than a Jew.

Postures like Rose's lend themselves to the political abuse of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust. A case in point is Edward Said's discussion of Rose in the *London Review of Books*. Said likes to pose as "the-Other-who-Understands," but his essay reveals that when it comes to Jewish pain, he is an Other who just doesn't get it. This is not to say that some of his observations are not trenchant (I make some points similar to his). Indeed, he defends a striking proposal, which follows suggestions by Adorno and musicologist Jean-Jacques Nattiez and to which I shall return, that the way to salvage Wagner is to be unfaithful to him. But this is not Said's primary concern, at least not here; we discover quickly that he has nonoperatic matters on his mind.

Wagner, Said reminds us, was a man of compulsions; in the morning he could be fixated on water and baths, in the evening, on the ills of Italian and French opera, or something else. The Jews?—just another mania, like hydrotherapy. What Said ignores, conveniently, is this: debate as one might if hydro-obsessions are expressed in his operas, no political movement hailing Wagner sought to destroy the oceans. If Rose reduces Wagner's life and art to anti-Semitism, Said reduces anti-Semitism to one complex among many. By denying the specificity of anti-Semitism, one easily denies the need for a specific response to it, say, a Jewish state.

Yet this doesn't prevent Said from arguing with Rose about playing Wagner in a state Said thinks shouldn't have been created. Rose contends that Wagner should be banned in Israel not because his music distresses Holocaust survivors but because in an "instant" age of mass media, the slaughter of six million Jews will be forgotten without recourse to proper ritual. Banning Wagner "is a preeminent rite for warding off the dissolution of one of the core experiences of Jewish history and memory." Said responds that Rose is "a fundamentalist Khomeini of the arts," who, like the mullahs, would use state power to burn books. He asserts that if Rose's analysis is right, Wagner's music *should* be played in Israel as a reminder of the calamity of bigotry.

A curious debate. Rose thinks Wagner's operas are intrinsically prejudiced but would ban them in Israel, where, presumably, they cannot foster anti-Semitism; he would allow them to be performed elsewhere, where "profoundly anti-semitic" works would, presumably, encourage anti-Semitism. Said proposes that Israelis be reminded of genocide by listening to an anti-Semite's music. Israelis may not find this convincing, especially since Said then turns from Wagner and announces to *London Review* readers that all Zionist leaders favored "ridding Palestine of Palestinians by any means necessary" and that Israel was

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"projected" as an "Arab-free" state. Both statements are historical libels. Yet it is none less than Rose who comes to Said's rescue with a letter to the editor rationalizing "transfer"—the Orwellian euphemism adopted by right-wing Zionists for expelling all Palestinians from their homes.

Nietzsche once complained that Wagner's music "sweats" too much. So with these two.

In Lieu of a Finale

The case of Wagner, it seems to me, must engender resignation: one must simply accept the unpalatable fact that great art sometimes comes of wretched people. And worse: their wretchedness may drive or thread their creativity.

But there is a solution, perhaps imperfect, to the *Wagnerfrage*. Discussing Wagner's relevance in 1963, Adorno proposed, "If it is true about Wagner that no matter what one does, it is wrong, the thing that is still most likely to help is to force what is false, flawed, antinomical out into the open, rather than glossing over it and generating a kind of harmony to which the most profound element in Wagner is antithetical. For that reason, only experimental solutions are justified today; only what injures the Wagner orthodoxy is true."

Following Adorno, I'd like to make a modest proposal, one that allows performance of Wagner's operas irrespective of his possibly anti-Semitic intentions. Mime, Alberich, Hagan, Beckmesser—all the characters Wagner demonized—should be made up to look like Richard Wagner. An alienation effect would thereby be ensured. Contrary to Wagner's aim of emotionalizing the intellect, the opposite will be the case. The audience will be constrained to reflect and the composer will be revealed. This would be a fitting tribute to a man who believed myth but not history is truth; who wrote for the theater, a world of illusions, but named his villa at Bayreuth *Wahnfried*—peace from illusions. And last, though certainly not least, it would allow Richard Wagner's demon to sing for himself. □

Notes

[1] Details are taken from Sonia Slatin, "Opera and Revolution: *La Muette de Portici* and the Belgium Revolution of 1830 Revisited," *Journal of Musicological Research* 3, 1979, and Ch. Poplimont, *La Belgique depuis mil huit cent trente* (Bruxelles: Philippant, 1848).

[2] Donald Jay Grout with Hermine Weigel Williams, *A Short History of Opera*, 3rd edition. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), pp. 40–1, 56. Throughout this essay, I have frequently drawn historical points from this valuable and rich book.

[3] George Martin, "Verdi and the Risorgimento," in Wm. Weaver and Martin Chusid, eds., *The Verdi Companion* (New York: Norton, 1979), p. 22. I take the description of the Italian events from Martin.

[4] Barry Millington, *Wagner* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

[5] Paul Lawrence Rose, *Wagner: Race and Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992).

[6] See Deryck Cooke's brilliant *I Saw the World End: A Study of Wagner's Ring* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 23.

[7] Ironically, Verdi, who was different from Wagner in every way—musically, in his personal decency, and in his humane, liberal patriotism—*did* write a patriotic opera about Friedrich Barbossa, but about his defeat by the Lombards in 1176. It was this opera, *La Battaglia di Legnano*, whose premier he conducted in Rome in 1849—with Mazzini, Garibaldi and the republicans arriving on the scene after the Pope was deposed—the same year in which when Wagner and Bakunin were on the Dresden barricades.

[8] See, in particular, Dieter Borchmeyer, "The Question of Anti-Semitism" in *Wagner Handbook*, U. Müller and P. Wapnewski, eds. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[9] The frequent claim that Wagner's relation to Levi proves his prejudices a trifle is misleading: not only was Wagner's behavior towards the self-hating Levi sadistic, but Wagner opposed using the Jewish conductor for *Parsifal* and the Munich Court Theater overruled him.

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Julius Lester

BLACKS, JEWS, AND FARRAKHAN

It is troubling that so many listen to Farrakhan. If no one listens his becomes a voice in the wilderness. But listening transforms monologue into relationship. Farrakhan's audiences are predominantly black, but blacks are not his only listeners. Jews listen, too, and with an almost compulsive fascination, making it unclear which group has the more intimate relationship with Farrakhan.

Relationships offer confirmation of identity and affirmation of self. Farrakhan confirms and affirms identity for both blacks *and* Jews. Because he does, blacks and Jews are mesmerized by what are, in essence, nothing more than a combination of simplistic nationalist ravings, angry harangues, crude anti-Semitic diatribes, and historical ignorance. (I use "Farrakhan" here to refer not only to the individual, but also other purveyors of black anti-Semitism.)

Before exploring what Farrakhan confirms for blacks and Jews, two illusory ideas must be addressed: first, that the black anti-Semitism of the past two decades is new, and second, that blacks and Jews share a common oppression.

The black-Jewish coalition of the civil rights era is put forward as the shining paradigm of what was and what could be again "if only. . . ." As significant as that alliance was, it never represented the *only* relationship between blacks and Jews. The black-Jewish coalition was between the elites of both peoples.

At the grass roots level, however, there was never an alliance. Black anti-Semitism has deep roots, as shown in the following tale from Zora Neale Hurston's introduction to her classic collection *Mules and Men*.

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> When God created people, He didn't give them their souls. God knew that the soul was very powerful and he wanted to wait until people were strong enough to hold their souls in their bodies. God kept the soul beneath the skirts of his garment and one day, a white man walked past God and just as he did, a little breeze lifted up the hem of God's skirt and some light from the soul streamed out and it was so bright that the white man got scared and ran away. Next day, a black man was walking past God and he got curious about the soul, so he went over and tried to peek under God's skirt and the light and warmth from the soul was so powerful that it knocked him over and he ran away. A few days later, along came the Jew. He was walking past God when a big wind came and lifted up God's skirt. The Jew saw the soul gleaming brightly and streaming with lights of many colors and he ran and grabbed the soul. Well, the soul was so powerful that it knocked the Jew down and rolled him over and over on the ground. But the Jew wouldn't let go. That soul knocked him up in the sky and back down on the ground, but the Jew still wouldn't let go. The Jew hugged the soul so hard that it broke into a lot of little pieces. The white man and the black man came and picked up the little pieces and put them inside and that's how man got his soul. But one of these days, God is going to make the Jew divide that soul up fair so everybody gets equal amounts.

The tale is a black folk response to the concept of Jews as the Chosen People. Just as Christians and Muslims asserted their election to supplant Jews and be God's *new* chosen people, so today Louis Farrakhan:

> This I want the Jews to know and we want the world to know: that they are not the chosen people of God. . . .
> The Holy Koran charges the Jews with taking the message of God and altering that message and giving the people a book written by their own

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> hands, saying that the book is from God . . . the Jews . . . fed a corrupted light through this book and were the fathers of false religions and false religious practices. They cannot be considered the friend of God, doing such evil.
>
> I am not anti-Jew. I am pro-truth, but in this serious hour, the truth must be told so that the true people of God may come up into view of the entire world. These that have stolen our identity, these that have dressed themselves up in our garments must be defrocked today, that the world may see who are the true chosen people of Almighty God. (*New York Times*, June 29, 1984)

Farrakhan's agenda is not only political; it is theological (questions of identity often are). That is why statements condemning Farrakhan have not only been ineffective but have increased his credibility among blacks.

Moral appeals are effective only when speaker and listener belong to the same "moral community," Laurence Thomas notes in his important new book, *Vessels of Evil: American Slavery and the Holocaust*. Thomas observes that "the moral expectations . . . people have of both themselves and others . . . are generally tied to the consensus of the moral community in which they live and with which they identify."

The black-Jewish coalition of the civil rights era succeeded because blacks and Jews shared a vision of a moral community in which racial integration and equal opportunity were agreed on as the central values and goals. The extent to which blacks and Jews reside in the same moral universe is questionable nowadays. Black-Jewish conflicts are mesmerizing, because they are not as much about blacks and Jews as they are about struggles between radically different moral communities for possession of God's soul.

At one time blacks and Jews were perceived to be denizens of the same moral community, allies and compatriots in the land of oppression. In her seminal work, *In the Almost Promised Land: American Jews and Blacks, 1915–1935*, Haisa Diner found striking illustrations of the American Jewish identification with blacks in the Jewish press. For instance we read in the Yiddish language *Forward*, July 1917:

> The situation of the Negroes in America is very comparable to the situation of the Jews . . . in Russia. The Negro diaspora, the special laws, the decrees, the pogroms and also the Negro complaints, the Negro hopes are very similar to those which we Jews . . . lived through.

Jews saw themselves especially suited to be advocates for blacks. "Many of us were oppressed in Old Russia as the Negroes in free America. We can understand them better and therefore we sound their appeal wide quickly." (*Forward*, June 4, 1930.)

It is remarkable that Jews did not opt automatically for assimilation in the face of anti-Semitism in the dominant society but chose instead to empathize with and act on behalf of the oppressed. The integrity of Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement should not be questioned or denied. That the motivation for that involvement was not as pure as some today would like to think does not mean it was Machiavellian, either. The motivations were complex, combining genuine empathy and self-interest, which also characterized the motivation of the blacks in the alliance.

Jews also felt a "real bitterness" about American anti-Semitism, Diner writes, but were "afraid to vent the full extent of their anxiety" directly. They expressed it, in part, "through the problems of blacks." Jews also saw themselves as "cultural bridges between the white and black worlds because they understood both." As whites, they could move more easily in the wider society, but as members of an oppressed group, they understood blacks. "Because of that empathy, *the black experience had become extremely personal to Jews*." (My emphasis.)

An essential element of secular and liberal religious Jewish identity became bound to blacks. Jews had taken blacks into the nexus of their emotions, never dreaming that blacks had not done the same. " 'Being good' to blacks," writes Diner, "dealing sensitively and sympathetically with them was perceived as a natural outgrowth of the Jewish tradition, and as ethnic group leaders they had a real stake in the preservation of that tradition. They believed that their efforts and concerns for American

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blacks set Jews apart from other Americans, apart from Christians. This became, in effect, *the American version of the "Chosen People" notion, the American adoption of the message from Mount Sinai."* (My emphasis.)

For blacks, on the other hand, anti-Semitism expresses a deep resentment at the Jewish presumption of shared oppression. What was true to some extent in the early decades of this century is not true at century's close. Today blacks see Jews as white because in a white society, white skin is an advantage, even if you're a Jew.

Jewish success, however, cannot be attributed only to skin color, or education and hard work, as Farrakhan astutely pointed out last fall in a speech at California State University at Northridge: ". . .success is not a mystery; success is not by chance . . . when you find a synagogue, next to it you find a shul. What is going on in there? . . . They're teaching their people from the tradition. The school is teaching them the history of themselves and their culture, so that no matter where Jews go, they remain intact. Jews know who they are, they know their origin in the world, they know their history. But the black has been deprived of such knowledge. . . ." (*Boston Jewish Times*, November 12, 1993)

The black-Jewish alliance was doomed to implode because the specific elements of shared oppression were never as great as the differences. No difference is more profound than Jewish certainty about the Jew's place in history and before God. Regardless of how an individual Jew may feel about being a Jew, the solidity of Jewish history, culture, and religion are incontrovertible. It is the very absence of confidence among African Americans in the solidity of life itself that marks the gulf between blacks and Jews.

Laurence Thomas expands on Orlando Patterson's concept of "natal alienation." This is the condition that results when "the social practices" of a society "forcibly prevent" members of an ethnic group "from fully participating in and thus having a secure knowledge of their historical-cultural traditions," as well as being denied "full membership in the society." The alienation is total because the group has "neither equality nor their historical-cultural traditions."

Blacks of every economic class and educational level respond to Farrakhan because he makes visible the natal alienation all blacks know:

> What is the problem? The problem is the fear on the part of those in power of the rise of black men and women to the destiny that Almighty God has called us to. . . . Today in America, the black male is under siege. Today, in America, because of hate, not taught by Farrakhan, but *hate that has been bred into black men and women for self and for their own kind and for their origins in the world. We have been made to hate ourselves, our color, our hair, our features, our origins. So that to destroy one another is to destroy what we hate. So that today black young men are the No. 1 destroyers of self.* . . . (My emphasis.)
>
> Now these black people that are so disrespected by the world, and so disrespectful of self have a divine destiny. You're a wonderful people, destroyed, but even in your destruction, there is a beauty that emanates from you that makes you like the salt of the earth. . . . *You are the only people that don't have a native language that ties you to Africa and your original roots—you ain't got it. Why? How did you lose your tongue? You lost your tongue because you lost your mother. Mother gone, father gone, a motherless child sees what? A hard time. This is what the slave master did. See, what they want to show is* Schindler's List. *I ain't got no problem with that; I have no problem with that . . . you don't have nobody to tell your story. So don't get angry because* Schindler's List *is out there. Nobody wants to talk about what happened to black people. And because I said that the holocaust of black people was 100 times worse than the holocaust of Jews, they were angry with me for even comparing this.* . . . (My emphasis.) (*Boston Globe*, March 13, 1994)

Thomas points out that people who suffer from natal alienation are "without a narrative" or "set of narratives that defines values and positive goals and fixes points of historical significance and ennobling rituals that cannot be readily appropriated . . . the narratives of a people define their conception of the good." In other words, the narratives of a people establish

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the foundations and norms for their moral community.

Much anti-Semitism among blacks is an expression of envy of the Jewish narrative, and the painful longing for a healing narrative of their own.

Last year, Gerald Early, chair of the African and Afro-American Studies department at Washington University, wrote in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* of a trip he took to Israel with a group of blacks. After visiting the Holocaust Memorial of Yad Vashem, the black delegation wondered why blacks had not done more to enshrine the memory of slavery as Jews had the Holocaust. Why was it that blacks lacked museums devoted to their history, and were not as tightly organized as Jews seemed to be? Early answers: "While in Israel I learned this about the black American mind: That *blacks are in awe and jealous of the enormous achievements of Jews* and, as we see it, their privileges: and *we feel inferior to them.*" (My emphasis.)

Neither alliance nor dialogue is possible when one group feels inferior to and shamed by the other, when one group is riven with self-hatred and perceives itself as abandoned, if not wholly rejected by God, while the other knows the pride of accomplishment and has narrative saying it is God's Chosen.

Thomas argues that "the most telling sign of alienation is demonstrated by the black acceptance of Christianity," that is, "the acceptance of the religious traditions of one's oppressor."

Farrakhan speaks to such alienation by fashioning narratives that bestow an African-American tradition in history and an African-American identity before God. Part of that narrative is described by C. Eric Lincoln in his *The Black Muslims in America*:

> The true believer who becomes a Muslim casts off at last his old self and takes on a new identity. He changes his name, his religion, his homeland, his moral and cultural values, his very purpose in living. He is no longer a Negro. . . . Now he is a Black Man—divine, ruler of the universe, different in degree only from Allah Himself. . . . His new life is not an easy one: it demands unquestioning faith, unrelenting self-mastery, *unremitting hatred.* (My emphasis.)

Farrakhan's other narrative strategy is devaluation of Jews, which is not mutually exclusive from the one Lincoln describes. If one lacks a narrative that gives a definition of the good, a narrative which at least gives a definition of evil is preferable to no narrative at all.

The Jewish sense of moral community wants blacks to condemn Farrakhan's anti-Semitism, but the black sense of moral community, particularly among the young, needs the moral autonomy that comes when a community chooses its own leader. The power to choose one's own leaders is a greater moral imperative for blacks than repudiating anti-Semitism. To possess one's identity entails the power to make one's own choices, even wrong and despicable ones.

That so many blacks listen to and respond to Farrakhan indicates a frightening nihilism rampant in black America. Farrakhan fills the void with a narrative of anti-Semitism, historical lies, and appeals to black superiority. Only a people desperate to the point of disintegration could take Farrakhan seriously. If Farrakhan's sympathizers were to pause, they would realize that their active and passive support for him creates a climate that permits whites to be as publicly hateful of blacks as Farrakhan is of Jews. Any infatuation with anti-Semitism among blacks can only result in more virile anti-black racism.

Still, the black-Jewish conflict is more than a turf war between minorities. Blacks and Jews are merely acting out a dimension of one of the most serious moral crises in the nation's history, a crisis in which the nation finds itself without a sense of moral community and with a weakened narrative. For all the changes wrought during the sixties, none are so with us as these losses. In different ways, the assassinations of John Kennedy, Malcolm X, Robert Kennedy, and most especially, Martin Luther King, Jr., killed the national faith that the good would always prevail. It would not be too much to argue that something of the good in ourselves died when those men were murdered. If the consequence of goodness is assassination, why would anyone, black or white, want

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to do ever again what is right and is good? The sense of moral community was further eroded by the decline in the moral authority of the presidency. Lyndon Johnson lied about Vietnam and had to leave office; Richard Nixon tried to cover up a burglary, deceived the American people, and resigned rather than risk impeachment. Succeeding presidents added no luster, and cynical affairs like Irangate only made matters worse.

Politico-religious fundamentalism has arisen in many quarters to fill the moral gap. It cuts across racial, class, and religious boundaries. Pat Robertson, Jerry Falwell, the ultra-Orthodox rabbinate, and Louis Farrakhan have much in common because each sees the world as an Armageddon with the Chosen (themselves and God) on one side and the Rejected (everyone else) on the other. Each offers a narrative of fear and exclusivity posturing as religious righteousness.

Since the day blacks arrived involuntarily on these shores they have confronted the question: where do we fit? That is now the question facing the nation. Where do any of us fit anymore? Farrakhan presents one set of answers, and Jewish attacks on him are not only ineffective but counterproductive. It is not Farrakhan's speech that should be silenced; rather, we—blacks, Jews, and whites—must be given—must create—something else to listen to, namely a narrative that gives us all an image of the good, the true, and the beautiful, an image in which we can see, not only ourselves as belonging to the good, but each other, too. What might that narrative be? Perhaps it is one some blacks and some Jews and others tried to create in the sixties, a narrative that saw as the good not race, but community, the "beloved community," as it was once called. It is a vision in which the needs of individualism are balanced by those of community, and community is not only that of my race or religion or region but of those who share an inclusive vision of humanity that extends beyond the immediacy of one's personal issues, that eschews the elevation of one's group as the apotheosis of humanity.

Farrakhan offers an ugly and hateful vision. It is no longer sufficient to express disapproval. It is time we offered an alternative. If we do not, we cede moral authority to those who, in their self-hatred, hate us all. □

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Eugene D. Genovese

THE QUESTION

The following essay by Eugene Genovese is really an open letter to the left, intended to provoke a discussion, and so we have circulated it to people likely to be provoked. Here are their responses and Genovese's reply. Since "The Question" is important, we will publish a selection of further correspondence in a future issue.—EDS.

". . . a decent respect to the opinions of mankind. . ."

As a university professor, I teach, participate in professional associations, lecture on various campuses, give papers at scholarly conferences, and review books for national journals and local newspapers: in short, I get around. For many years I have lived in dread of having to answer The Question. Curiously, no one has asked it.

At first I wondered if I had an ego problem. Did I feel bruised to learn that I was not important enough to be asked? Were not more visible and professionally celebrated chaps with similar backgrounds having to face the music? Apparently not. So far as I know, none of the others, whose number is legion, has been asked either.

The Question: "What did you know, and when did you know it?" For at the age of fifteen I became a Communist, and, although expelled from the party in 1950 at age twenty, I remained a supporter of the international movement and of the Soviet Union until there was nothing left to support. Now, as everyone knows, in a noble effort to liberate the human race from violence and oppression we broke all records for mass slaughter, piling up tens of millions of corpses in less than three-quarters of a century. When the Asian figures are properly calculated, the aggregate to our credit may reach the seemingly incredible numbers widely claimed. Those who are big on multiculturalism might note that the great majority of our victims were nonwhite.

Never having been much good at math, I shy away from quibbles over statistics. Still, all quibbles aside, we have a disquieting number of corpses to account for.

Those of us who have preached the need to break eggs in order to make omelets might note the political complexion of some of the eggs. About twenty years ago, picking up on some passages in Roy Medvedev's *Let History Judge*, I wondered if Comrade Stalin had not killed more communists than were killed by all the bourgeois, imperialist, Fascist, and Nazi regimes put together. "It can't be true," said I. "Has Comrade Medvedev taken up serious drinking?" So I sat down to do some rough arithmetic. (You do not have to be good at math to do that much arithmetic.) Alas, Comrade Medvedev had not taken up serious drinking.

Reflecting here on moral responsibility, I have referred to "we." For it has never occurred to me that the moral responsibility falls much less heavily on those of us on the American left than it fell on Comrade Stalin and those who replicated his feats in one country after another. And I am afraid that some of that moral responsibility falls on the "democratic socialists," "radical democrats," and other leftwingers who endlessly denounced Stalinism but could usually be counted on to support—"critically," of course—the essentials of our political line on world and national affairs.

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Especially amusing has been the spectacle of those who pronounced themselves anti-Stalinists and denounced the socialist countries at every turn and yet even today applaud each new revolution, although any damned fool has to know that most of them will end in the same place. For that matter, how could we have survived politically were it not for the countless liberals who, to one extent or another, supported us, apparently under the comforting delusion that we were social reformers in rather too much of a hurry—a delusion we ourselves never suffered from.

There are liberals and liberals, and a distinction would have to be made in a more leisurely presentation. Even in academia there are indeed those who defend liberal principles tenaciously and honorably. But the countless opportunists and careerists who dominate the historical associations call themselves liberals as a matter of political convenience. They went with the McCarthyite flow in the 1950s and go with its left-wing variant today. In the unlikely prospect of a fascist or communist ascendancy tomorrow, they may be counted on to apply for party cards as soon as it looks like the smart move.

Many of my old comrades and almost all of those ostensibly independent radicals and high-minded liberals remain unruffled. After all, did we not often protest against some outrage or other in the Soviet Union or China, signing an indignant petition or open letter? I know I did. And does not that change everything? I am afraid not, but I have nothing to offer as critique other than that which may be found in Galatians 6:7.

On May 11, 1992, having been invited by the right-wing American Enterprise Institute to reflect on the collapse of the socialist countries, I summoned up whatever capacity I have for dissembling in an effort to deflect the one question I did not want to answer. I did not want to answer it before a right-wing audience because I feared I would unleash my Sicilian temper and counterattack with the litany of the crimes of the imperialists and their insufferable apologists. I began:

> It is a great pleasure to be with you today, although, since I claim expertise only as a historian of the Old South, I speak on current issues with trepidation. I do hope that your invitation carries no sadistic intent—that you do not expect an autobiographical *mea culpa*. For while it is true that I have been a Marxist and a bitter-end supporter of the Soviet Union, I dislike autobiographies and admire the CIA's noble dictum, "Admit nothing, explain nothing, apologize for nothing."

The audience responded with good-natured laughter. Generally speaking, rightwingers are decidedly more courteous than we of the left and would not think of abusing their guests, as I probably would have abused them if challenged. They laid some tough questions on me during the discussion period, but not The Question.

Recently, I remarked upon the corpses to a well-known left-wing journalist with whom my wife and I were having dinner. He looked disgusted: "You? You of all people are getting masochistic?" I reassured him as best I could. For, no, I am not getting masochistic in my old age. No, I am not about to cringe before rightwingers who supported numerous imperialist slaughters or social democrats whose responsible and moderate governments aided and abetted them. Yes, I do remember the glorious record of the bourgeoisie in the slave trade and the plantation colonies and the mass murders in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. I do recall that the Holocaust was not our doing. I still burn at the indifference with which virtually the whole American public received the reports of a quarter million Indonesian workers and peasants butchered in the 1960s, not in a civil war but in their beds. And I know the rest. No, I would not stand still for The Question from those people and would probably tell them what I have always told my classes, "Your side has had its mass murderers, and we have had ours."

Perhaps knowledge of the record of imperialist atrocities leads our liberal colleagues to refuse to single us out by asking The Question. But I am afraid not. After all, they never stop asking southern whites about their crimes, real and imagined, against blacks. And let's face it: all the combined crimes of white southerners,

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at least if we restrict ourselves to the period since emancipation, would be worth no more than a footnote in a casebook that starred us.

A few years ago, there was a successful effort to get the Organization of American Historians (OAH) to condemn apartheid in South Africa. In the OAH and other professional associations, Professor Wilborne Washburne resolutely opposed this politicization, and attempted to expose its hypocrisy by offering an amendment to condemn the "necklacing" of black South Africans, including children, by the militants of the African National Congress. (For those who have forgotten, "necklacing" was execution by burning the victims alive.) The ANC subsequently repudiated necklacing as not only wrong but barbarous. The OAH has yet to endorse that repudiation.

I laughed. Those bloody South African whites did kill a lot of blacks and ought to answer for it, but throughout their whole history they probably never equaled the numbers we put up in one of our more spirited month's work. I laughed even harder when our liberal colleagues poured out their wrath on the ghastly racists in South Africa while they remained silent about the immeasurably greater slaughters occasioned by the periodic ethnic cleansing that was—and is—going on in black Africa and every other part of the globe. The *New York Times* recently announced that the death toll in the latest round of ethnic cleansing in Burundi has reached 150,000, with the fate of a half million or so refugees in doubt. The historical associations have not been heard from. Nor should anyone expect that they will be.

If we are to believe the worthies of the radical left, to pose The Question means to engage in a reactionary ploy to deflect attention from the oppression of women, gays, and other beleaguered minorities. Scholars in our own ranks have shown precious little interest in reflecting seriously on the collapse of the socialist countries we supported to the bitter end or on any personal responsibilities we might have for the occasional unpleasantness that led to so sad a denouement.

And sad the denouement has been. For one might make a case of sorts to justify mass slaughters as the necessary price to be paid for a grand human liberation. Terrible as the sacrifices may have been, were they not justified by the beautiful world of equality, justice, and universal love we were creating for our children? During the communist revolution of 1919 in Hungary, Sigmund Freud startled his friends by announcing that he had become half a Bolshevik. One of his communist students explained that the revolution would mean oceans of blood out of which would come a just and humane society. Freud became half a Bolshevik: he declared his belief in every word of the first half.

In retrospect Freud looks good and we not so good. Our justification began to look seedy when the grand liberation featured hideous political regimes under which no sane person would want to live. It became preposterous when our project ended in the ignominious collapse of the social system that was supposed to undergird a brave new world and justify the staggering sacrifice of human life.

We easily forget the economic rationale that Marx taught us, namely, that socialism would have to provide unprecedented abundance if it were to sustain social liberation of any kind. With a few notable exceptions, leftists no longer find it fashionable to discuss economics at all beyond the now routine rejection of a "command economy" and some disingenuous mumbling about the necessity for markets. But where is there a serious attempt to determine the extent to which any socialism could function without a command economy or to show how a socialist economy could integrate markets? A few left-wing economists, most notably Louis Ferleger and Jay Mandle, tried to raise these questions long before the collapse of the socialist economies, but they were effectively shut out of the left-wing press and are still ignored. And we may doubt that the wry remark of Nancy Folbre and Samuel Bowles, two other respected left-wing economists, will cause a wrinkle: "Leftwing economists—among whom we count ourselves—have thus

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far failed to come up with a convincing alternative to capitalism." (Nancy Folbre and Samuel Bowles, letter to the *Nation*, Nov. 29, 1993; and see also, Louis Ferleger and Jay R. Mandle, *A New Mandate: Democratic Choices for a Prosperous Economy*, University of Missouri Press, 1994).

No one should be surprised that none of our leading historical associations have thought it intellectually challenging to devote sessions at their enormous annual meetings to frank discussions of the socialist debacle. We of the left are regularly invited to give papers on just about any subject except this one. We are not asked to assess the achievements as well as the disasters, the heroism as well as the crimes, and the lessons we ourselves have learned from a tragic experience. No one need be surprised that we have never been called upon to explain ourselves. The *pezzonovanti* of our profession have more important things on their minds. When they can take time away from their primary concern (the distribution of jobs, prizes, and other forms of patronage), they are immersed in grave condemnations of the appalling violations of human rights by Christopher Columbus. I know that it is in bad taste to laugh, but I laugh anyway. I would rather be judged boorish than seen throwing up.

We do not need guilt trips and breast-beating. We do need a sober reassessment of the ideological foundations of our political course. I am not sure that I am right to refuse to answer to our long-time political adversaries. But I am sure that we of the left have to answer to ourselves, to each other, to the movement to which we have devoted our lives, and especially to the millions of our comrades who were themselves slaughtered in a heroic effort to make the world a better place. The left sneers at Burke's great dictum that government—or, better, society—is a compact between the living, the dead, and the as-yet unborn. But the truth of the dictum returns to haunt us again and again. If nothing else, we cannot escape the duty to see that the millions of our comrades who died in revolutionary struggles did not die in vain.

Am I crazy to think that if we do not understand why and how we did what we did, we shall certainly end by doing it again—and again? Crazy I may be, but I try not to be a fool. And only a fool would trust those who are now playing possum with even a modicum of political power.

What did we know, and when did we know it? We knew everything essential and knew it from the beginning. This short answer will doubtless be hotly contested by the substantial number of leftwingers now ensconced in the academic establishment. I can hear them now: "Where does Genovese get off speaking for us? Yes, he himself always knew. He never even had the decency to pretend not to know. He thereby proved himself the cad we have always known him to be. But we ourselves never even imagined that we were hearing anything more than the usual stories circulated by imperialists and reactionaries. Honest."

I am prepared to accept those pleas of innocence, and I hope that everyone else exercises Christian charity and accepts them too. But I do worry about where pleas of innocence will land those who offer them. It occurs to me that it would be much safer to admit complicity. For Americans who honor the spirit and content of the Constitution would feel compelled to defend our academic freedom, including our right to have borne with equanimity the blood purges and mass executions. If, however, our innocents insist upon pleading ignorance rather than a complicity permitted by the Constitution, they ruin themselves. Especially the historians among them. For they thereby admit to a willful refusal to examine the evidence that had been piled high from the beginning. Thus they confess to professional incompetence. I counsel against such a plea, for it would constitute grounds for revocation of tenure. Safer to plead *no lo contendere*.

When someone gets around to asking me The Question I shall answer frankly, explaining as best I can my reasons for having gone along. But I shall insist upon doing so in a forum in which "democratic socialists," "radical democrats," and liberals are called upon to answer too. For it is our collective dirty linen that has to be washed. And besides, our right-wing adversaries already know the answer, even if

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they have no few hard questions to answer themselves.

For the moment I shall settle for a few topic sentences. The horrors did not arise from perversions of radical ideology but from the ideology itself. We were led into complicity with mass murder and the desecration of our professed ideals not by Stalinist or other corruptions of high ideals, much less by unfortunate twists in some presumably objective course of historical development, but by a deep flaw in our very understanding of human nature—its frailty and its possibilities—and by our inability to replace the moral and ethical baseline long provided by the religion we have dismissed with indifference, not to say contempt.

The question of moral responsibility has been raised within the left, if gingerly and indirectly, by a few brave souls like Roberto Mangabeira Unger and Cornel West, who have drawn attention to the price we have paid for scouting Christian ethics while having nothing to substitute and who have, in effect, called for an end to the blind hatreds that confuse the sin with the sinner. Unger and West are justly revered figures on the left and accorded at least formal respect. Yet their efforts toward a reassessment of the religious foundations of political ethics have not sparked the slightest discussion. It is fair to ask: what kind of respect is that? Are we supposed to believe that Unger and West have been kidding?

Our whole project of "human liberation" has rested on a series of gigantic illusions. The catastrophic consequences of our failure during this century—not merely the body count but the monotonous recurrence of despotism and wanton cruelty—cannot be dismissed as aberrations. Slimmed down to a technologically appropriate scale, they have followed in the wake of victories by radical egalitarian movements throughout history. We have yet to answer our right-wing critics' claims, which are regrettably well documented, that throughout history, from ancient times to the peasant wars of the sixteenth century to the Reign of Terror and beyond, social movements that have espoused radical egalitarianism and participatory democracy have begun with mass murder and ended in despotism.

Let us grant, *arguendo*, that the ruling classes have done worse. Whatever solace that thought may give us, our own problem remains: what kind of society could we build on a worldview marred by flagrant irrationalities paraded as self-evident truths, even if reinforced by sandbox cries of "You're another"?

The allegedly high ideals we placed at the center of our ideology and politics are precisely what need to be reexamined, but they can no longer even be made a subject for discussion in the mass media and our universities, to say nothing of the left itself. They are givens: an unattainable equality of condition; a radical democracy that has always ended in the tyranny it is supposed to overcome; a celebration of human goodness or malleability, accompanied by the daily announcement of newly discovered "inalienable rights" to personal self-expression; destruction of all hierarchy and elites, as if ideological repudiation has ever prevented or ever could prevent the formation and reformation of hierarchies and elites; condemnation of "illegitimate" authority in the absence of any notion of what might constitute legitimate authority; and, at the root of all, a thorough secularization of society, bolstered by the monstrous lie that the constitutional separation of church and state was meant to separate religion from society. And we have yet to reassess the anti-Americanism—the self-hatred implicit in the attitude we have generally affected toward our country—that has led us into countless stupidities and worse.

Let us give ourselves some credit: through it all we have preserved a rich sense of humor. The destruction of hierarchies, elites, and authority is to be effected through the concentration of power in a Leviathan state miraculously free of all such reactionary encumbrances.

No wonder liberals are ready to absolve us from our sins without first hearing our confession. No wonder we are witnessing the virtual fusion of left-liberalism and revolutionary radicalism in the wake of the collapse of the

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socialist countries. For most left-wing liberals share with radicals much the same ideology of personal liberation. Radicals and conservatives alike have always charged liberals with bad faith in refusing to carry out the logic of their own egalitarian and radical-democratic premises. They have been right about the refusal but not necessarily about the bad faith. There are more charitable explanations, including a healthy gut revulsion by humane liberals against the substitution of logical consistency for common decency and common sense.

I have been piling up assertions and may be wrong on all counts. But am I wrong in believing that unless the left reopens these fundamental questions it will have no future and deserve none? The deepest trouble with "political correctness" arises from its thinly disguised invitation to an endless repetition of crimes, atrocities, and, worst of all, failures. Yes, worst of all the failures. For the deepening horror that Black America faces, to speak of no other impending horror, cannot be arrested by a morally bankrupt movement with an appalling record of political and economic failure, no matter how many pyrrhic victories it piles up on deranged and degraded college campuses.

The left has been right to fight for social justice. As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, no friend of ours, recently observed, "Although the earthly ideal of Socialism-Communism has collapsed, the problems it purported to solve remain: the brazen use of social advantage and the inordinate power of money, which often direct the very course of events" (*New York Times*, Nov. 28, 1993). Our indictment of class injustice, racism, and the denigration of women has not been rendered less urgent by the failure of socialism. The millions of our own martyred comrades who fought against those enormities need not have died in vain. But they will indeed have died in vain if we refuse to face our past squarely, subject our basic premises to stern review, own up to all that has gone wrong, and take the measures necessary to guarantee against the next round of the same old story.

On-Line with DISSENT

Upon the advice of several librarians, we have decided to stop printing a biennial index in the pages of *Dissent*. *Dissent* is now indexed in *Academic Abstracts*, the Infotrak Academic Index, *Magazine Article Summaries*, the *PAIS Bulletin,* University Microfilms, Inc. (UMI), the *Social Sciences Index*, and the *Social Science Source*. Readers and librarians who wish to receive a copy of the index for Volumes 39 and 40 of *Dissent* (Winter 1992 through Fall 1993) can write to *Dissent*, 521 Fifth Avenue, N.Y., N.Y. 10017. Please include 52¢ postage.

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The Responses

Mitchell Cohen

Eugene D. Genovese writes powerfully against bad faith, against prevarication championed and recognized but not admitted. He is relentless: how can one confront impostors of liberation with timidity? Least of all when mendacity concerns mass murder and you admit your own complicity. If this were the entire substance of his polemic, one could readily, loudly, applaud. And one would acclaim his tenacity in posing "The Question" without the celebrated escape clause: "But look at what the imperialists did." What the Soviet experiment—and its imitators—wrought should be faced in itself; otherwise it is not faced at all.

Yet accolades should be muted. Not because Genovese isn't telling truths about Communist parties and fellow-travelers; he is. Nor because the problem vanished entirely with the Soviet bloc; it hasn't. No, restraint is called for because it is unclear what conclusions he draws about values, behavior, and responsibility from the collapse of his commitments, save that those commitments were quite bad. Indeed, he seems to be en route from one belief system to another when a little agnosticism might be in order.

He asks, rightly: "What did you know and when did you know it?" But having denied any escape clause to others in responding, Genovese provides himself one, first by dressing virtually all "democratic socialists," "radical democrats," "liberals," and communists in the same "collective dirty linen," and then by conveniently granting that "there are liberals and liberals and a distinction would have to be made in a more leisurely presentation." I'm sorry, this won't do. There has been and is a principled democratic left that never wore his drawers. It did not soil its own. That left recognized and denounced mass murder; it refused to call socialist anything not truly democratic; it insisted that liberal values must be intrinsic to the socialist project; it hankered after no vanguard parties and lent no "critical support" to generalissimos adorned by red plumes.

Genovese might turn to leftists—for examples, Irving Howe and Lewis Coser, beginning in the earliest issues of *Dissent* magazine—who, though profoundly dedicated to socialism, asserted that it was no longer a "young" or "innocent" idea and ought to be approached by its advocates as a problem, not as a panacea. They endured many invectives for demanding a self-critical left long before this necessity dawned on ex-proponents of the collapsed Soviet Union.

Perhaps it was because they were able to treat their deepest commitments critically that they never became neoconservatives. Certainly it was due to their critical sense that the communist "left" so derided them, and similar leftists. Recall the refrains: "They're really weak-kneed social democrats," or "They're not radicals, they're really bourgeois liberals," or, at best, "Subjectively they may be well-intentioned, but objectively they are servants of capital." Those whose left-wing credentials were, for decades, slandered by people with politics like Genovese's, are now

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urgently part of the culpable left for him. (I don't know the extent to which Genovese engaged in such diatribes, but he knows the phenomenon.) By maintaining that the communist "left," before and after the collapse of the USSR, is the criterion of what is left, Genovese hands Stalinism a posthumous victory.

Surely, if he would attack "radical egalitarianism," Genovese must begin by making distinctions.

And with a little circumspection; the truly difficult thing is to draw lines without being sectarian. For Genovese anything that went wrong flows out of the Idea, more precisely, a few ideas that merge. Was it really radical egalitarianism, participatory democracy, and secularization that produced the Gulag? Or is this another escape clause, a teleology that occludes the "sober reassessment" of ideas for which Genovese calls? Is not denouncing "radicalism" a little too easy? Civil rights workers throughout the South were branded "radicals." So what? They wanted radical change, both political and social, and what was more appropriate than changing radically the world of Jim Crow? Might not the "radicalism" of one's egalitarianism, at least sometimes, be a function of the inequity one faces? Now, no particular response is justified by the fact of inequity alone. But instead of reproving "radical egalitarianism" as if it were the same thing in all times and places, might it not be more fruitful to elucidate, as Michael Walzer has for over two decades, complex rather than simple notions of equality?

What of participatory democracy? Yes, this idea engenders difficulties that are, too often, belittled on the left (difficulties best attenuated, in my view, by liberal constitutional principles, although the latter equally require participatory correctives). Still, is not blaming "participatory democracy" for the Gulag rather like excoriating the entire left for what Leninists and Stalinists did and said?—a camouflage of the specific political choices that Genovese and his confederates made? Lenin a participatory democrat? Stalin a radical egalitarian? Perhaps—if you believed that the People's Democracies of Eastern Europe were democracies.

Finally, Genovese determines that secularism is the evil at the "root of all," for we have been unable "to replace the moral and ethical baseline long provided by the religion we have dismissed with indifference." Dear professor of history: secular humanist that I am, I will, keeping with a modern tradition, defend to the death your right to your religious beliefs. But I will also pose some Questions to you: Where are the Crusades in your scheme? The Inquisition? Expulsion of the Christ-killers from England in the thirteenth century? From France in the fourteenth and from Spain in the fifteenth? Slaughter of Catholics and Protestants by each other in the religious wars of the sixteenth century? Religion *was* "the moral and ethical baseline" of Western society until some two centuries ago, and secularism responded to the intolerance and despotism enacted in its name by believers whose feverish sectarianism resembles nothing so much as that of Stalinists.

Will you contend that such behavior corrupts religion's high ideals, something you won't grant to left-wing ideals? Well, I will grant it to both sets of ideals, though not always and never in a blanket or uncritical way, and without allowing the corruptors a back door out, be it through denial or confession. Since Genovese inclines to religious language (for me the issue is existential): sin without the sinner, and vice versa, is morally meaningless. Separate what you do from what you are, and you always have an escape clause by which to shirk responsibility. If there is something to be learned from the willingness to see millions die in the short run for utopia in the long run it is that the form and content of politics shape one another. Many ex-communists—especially those who become neoconservatives—try to expunge the content without questioning the form. Leninists with another doctrine, they imagine, conveniently, that ideology alone was the problem. As to their own judgment—if they questioned that, they might be constrained to quiet reflection for a while, perhaps a very long time.

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Eric Foner

I agree with Eugene D. Genovese that the left needs to rethink some of its premises. His polemic is not, however, a useful contribution to this reappraisal.

The first article by Genovese I can recall reading was "Dr. Herbert Aptheker's Retreat from Marxism," a bitter attack on Aptheker's "flight from an unambiguous class viewpoint" via his "pitiable" belief in what was then called peaceful coexistence. Why did this long-forgotten piece, which appeared in *Science and Society* in 1963, come to mind while I read Genovese's latest manifesto? The politics could not be more different, but in their tone and mode of argument, their Manichaean view of a world divided into two "sides" with no middle ground, their penchant for personal abuse and intellectual fundamentalism, the two pieces are remarkably similar. The cast of characters has changed, but the cast of mind remains the same.

As one who has known Genovese, off and on, for nearly thirty years, I have often been struck by the contrast between his historical scholarship, which at its best is informed by a nuanced appreciation of historical complexity, and his political pronouncements, which consistently lack a sense of balance and often, as in the present instance, border on the incoherent. In the current manifesto, he offers broad accusations and sweeping generalizations without a shred of supporting evidence. How many scholars or members of the American left actually supported the Soviet Union "to the bitter end"? Who are the "opportunists and careerists" currently dominating the historical associations, who "went with the McCarthyite flow" in the 1950s and now pay lip service to political correctness? The last three presidents of the American Historical Association have been Frederic E. Wakeman, Jr., Louise Tilly, and Thomas Holt; of the Organization of American Historians, Joyce Appleby, Lawrence Levine, and myself. None of these, so far as I am aware, can be described as either a former McCarthyite or an unprincipled panderer to fashionable political views. Then, there are the leaps of logic that dissolve under close scrutiny. Genovese generates a great deal of passion, but never gets around to explaining precisely why anyone on the American left who supported even part of the USSR's "political line" (which at various times included anti-Fascism, promotion of colonial independence, and opposition to the war in Vietnam) bears moral responsibility for the crimes of Stalin.

A balanced reassessment of the history of American communism is certainly in order. When it appears, it will have to account not simply for silence in the face of unspeakable crimes, but communists' contribution to some of this country's most important struggles for social betterment. In the course of Genovese's piece, however, it becomes clear that his target is not really the ex-Soviet Union or Western Communist parties, but a far broader grouping including liberals, veterans of the New Left, feminists, and believers in "personal liberation" and "radical democracy"—indeed, the very idea of social change. The political stance with which Genovese proposes to replace socialism is not presented in anything resembling a coherent manner, but it can be inferred from his random remarks. Human nature is immutable, hierarchy inevitable, equality impossible, the desire for personal autonomy pernicious, socialism equivalent to tyranny, religion the foundation of morality and politics (somehow, religious believers are not held culpable for the Inquisition or the millions killed in wars of religious intolerance). Although Genovese, for reasons difficult to understand from his article, refers to himself as part of the left, his current outlook has far more in common with a long tradition of elitist antiliberalism, including Tory romanticism and Old South criticism of capitalism in the nineteenth century, and with various expressions of right-wing ideology in the twentieth. The principles he enumerates offer no guidance whatever to those desiring to rethink the history of socialism while retaining a commitment to

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social change. Had they prevailed throughout American history, there would have been no antislavery movement, no feminism, labor movement, or civil rights struggle.

As one who grew up in an Old Left family, I can disabuse Genovese of at least one misapprehension. The Question—what did you know and when did you know it—was often discussed in my family, beginning not with the collapse of the USSR, but (at least in my personal memory) with Khrushchev's speech of 1956. If Genovese has never been asked The Question, perhaps it is because people who knew him also knew what form his answer was likely to take.

Robin D. G. Kelley

How would I answer "The Question" if it were asked of me? I wasn't even an embryo when Nikita Khrushchev unveiled Stalin's reign of terror to the rest of the world, though I was taught about it in excruciating detail beginning in the fifth grade. That was 1972. I knew Stalin as the world's most vicious slaughterer, and any thought of him returning from the dead scared me more than my grandfather's sermons about the devil delivered from his pulpit at St. John's Missionary Baptist Church. As a kid I also remember hearing how the communists were taking over Vietnam and enslaving little children. Yet, a couple years earlier, while grubbing down at a Black Panther party free breakfast program in New York City, I might have heard somebody say that the Viet Cong were our friends. I didn't pay much attention since I already had a friend; his name was Todd and he lived in the projects. In 1975 (by this time I had moved to Seattle), I joined the Civil Air Patrol (CAP) intent on eventually getting into the U.S. Air Force Academy. In CAP we not only studied the record of brutality and domination behind the Iron Curtain, we were tested on it.

What did I know and when did I know it? These narratives of Stalinism had a wider circulation and impact than stories about American communists and socialists risking their lives to fight for workers' rights, racial justice, or state support for the basic needs of poor families. Learning the latter in college drew me into the orbit of an American left (I refuse to believe there is just one) and persuaded me to study these old-time Marxists. Did this make me Stalin's collaborator? If so, at what point did I join forces with Soviet state repression? When I started calling myself a Marxist?

Like many of my colleagues, I am guilty of focusing on struggles for justice to the near exclusion of acts of injustice within these movements—a point my friend George Lipsitz rightfully criticized me for. But is that tantamount to pulling the trigger? To blame the so-called "American left" for the acts of left-wing death squads and communist leaders who employed state power as a form of terrorism is like holding all white people responsible for the crime of slavery in the United States. I do agree with Genovese, however, that we should be responsible for criticizing Stalinism, for giving our students an equally critical assessment of the left's ignoble history of state repression. Indeed, Genovese's essay, along with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the transformation of the U.S. left since then, gives us yet another occasion for a critical assessment of Stalinism.

And it's not as if this hasn't happened. Critical examinations of the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe, even Cuba have been major themes at the Socialist Scholars Conference. The recent work of scholars such as Ron Suny, Geoff Eley, and William G. Rosenberg are each moving toward reassessments of either Stalin himself (Suny), the Communist International and the European Left (Eley), and the Bolshevik role in workers' strikes (Rosenberg). These and many other scholars are facing The Question head on and with the kind of evidence

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and political commitment that would make the author of *Roll, Jordan, Roll* really quite proud.

The kind of consistency Genovese calls for, however, is sometimes lost in his own polemic. He is right to expose the hypocrisy of radicals who only attack mass slaughters from the right, but that doesn't mean apartheid, southern racism, or western conquest were any less devastating (or more humorous) than Stalinism. Is he implying that we ought to create a hierarchy of punishment based on body counts? Can oppression be quantified as such? To do so would give legitimacy to Afrocentrists who claim the Holocaust pales in comparison to the slave trade because the latter lasted longer and killed more.

Of course, when one reads between the lines it becomes clear that Genovese has another agenda: to criticize multiculturalism and expand the current litany of crimes under the rubric of "political correctness" to include the left's presumed silence around Stalinism. For example, he chides the Organization of American Historians for choosing battles associated with liberal and left causes. Although much of his critique should not be dismissed, I don't think the OAH's policy statements are simply a case of so-called "political correctness": the issues reflect the changing ethnic, racial, and gender makeup of the professional organizations. Certainly the backlash from conservatives within these professional organizations reflects the discomfort of previous generations who recall the days when they did not have to deal with "these people." After all, the very organizations that once discriminated against Jews, women, and people of color generally, have now become platforms for the victims of democracy to speak.

In the end, however, Genovese's anti-Stalinist shout in the forest of multiculturalism should be taken seriously. The left(s) ought to speak frankly and critically against domination in the name of progressive causes. But more important, we should be at the forefront of rooting out the oppressions that persist in the groves of academe—the consequences of which are far greater than passing a stupid resolution. All of us can name academics, particularly among the self-identified "left," who have attempted to use their influence to destroy careers or merely silence those critical of them. Of course, these institutional wars are neither new nor limited to radicals; the evidence of right-wing attacks on radical scholars is too overwhelming and familiar to recount here. But if we're going to confront "The Question" honestly, let us begin at home, in our departments, in our institutions, in our editorial boards and professional organizations. When I begin to count those who fell victim to the wrath of self-proclaimed radicals, the numbers are mind boggling. To the readers I ask: "What did you know, and when did you know it?"

Alice Kessler-Harris

For Eugene Genovese the time has come to confess, to acknowledge the silences of the 1950s, and, perhaps, to free ourselves to move forward. In a belated recognition of the evils of Stalinism, he condemns those on the left who failed to admit those evils earlier. And he dismisses as equally culpable those who spoke up if they did not also repudiate the social agenda of communism (with a small "c"). Any who continued to identify themselves as members of the left through the past forty years are complicit in the mass slaughters of Stalin and the persistence of mass slaughter everywhere.

Genovese's plea for confession is likely to fall on deaf ears in large measure because the piece also has a subtext: in both style and argument, it represents precisely the moral rectitude that he seeks to condemn. In implicating an amorphous and unidentified left—a "we" that encompasses everything from the barely liberal to the supporters of

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totalitarianism—in crimes ranging from fanaticism to genocide, Genovese denies the possibilities of differences within the left and promotes the kinds of intolerance that lead to the Gulag. In the language of the factionalist Old Left, the language of innuendo, vituperation, and denunciation, he seeks resolution, even absolution, along with potential allies he despises.

Why? Why on the one hand attempt to make common cause by appealing for a collective acknowledgment of what went wrong, and on the other insist that the mistakes are rooted in "a deep flaw in our understanding of human nature"? Why deride the positive possibilities of a set of shared values and then hold "the ideology itself" responsible for the coverup? This two-pronged attack gets Genovese neatly off the hook: locating both failure of human liberation and mass murder in the illusions we are all now called on to shed enables him to evade a fuller exploration of his own culpability.

Is it really the case that the "high ideals" of the left are the source of excess? Perhaps, but if so, one might say the same of every group wedded to ideological commitments, whether it is a group of "politically correct" students in universities or the religious fundamentalists now wreaking havoc everywhere. For just as replacing the secular values of a humane vision with the "moral and ethical baseline" of religion may compound our problems, not reduce them, so the search for human dignity inherent in the attempt to impose "politically correct" values is not itself wrong. In each case, the problem is not with the ideals but with the insistence on their moral indisputability. That's a disease of extremists, left and right. And it opens the question of how idealism gets turned into murderous dogmatism.

Conflating the left into a single category has other consequences as well, particularly its ability to wipe out the significant accomplishments achieved on behalf of human dignity by a variety of political groups. Much that was good came from the pressures of liberals and social democrats in the United States and Europe. Most of us would support the market restrictions their agenda imposed. And while the demise of the Soviet Union fuels the reaction against social programs of all kinds, it also holds the possibility for a liberal agenda to emerge. For example, the labor movement in the United States has historically struggled to achieve a political and social voice in the face of accusations of "communist" infiltration. Without the threat of an existing totalitarian socialism, might it have fared better? Might it not still do so? Would the United States have been better able to construct a more compassionate welfare state without the image of the "evil empire" stalking every attempt to promote social well-being? Would we willingly give up even the minimal modifications these programs impose on the market for a confession of guilt? Such gains as we have made have been the result of far more subtle analyses of problems of equality, and far more sophisticated estimations of human goodness than the ideological givens to which Genovese ascribes the left's self-destructive behavior. If, as Genovese concedes, there is much in the liberal and social democratic agendas that we do not want to eliminate, then let us acknowledge that it comes from a more complex rendering of notions of social justice and a less moralistic approach to ideology than that which Genovese wants us to claim as our legacy.

I agree with Genovese that historians bear a special responsibility for opening up exactly those questions that will help us shape the future. But I hope we never bog down in the kind of recrimination that is implicit in questions like "What did you know, and when did you know it?" Rather, our effort should be to turn our attention to the challenge posed by Eugene Genovese's final paragraphs. We need to understand the historical circumstances that facilitate a corruption of belief and that so consistently turn seemingly positive belief systems into a politics of morality. For the willingness of some elements of the left to defend the distortions of the Stalinist era, and to refuse to repudiate human violence wherever it occurs, comes not from a naive belief in the goodness of human nature or the attainability of equality of condition, but from self-righteous moralism. To shape the future effectively, we need to continue to explore how it happened

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that "fundamentalist" ideological differences managed to divide people of good will whose shared views of human freedom and social justice could, as effectively, have charted paths to consensus.

Christine Stansell

I very much appreciate the manifest content of Eugene Genovese's piece, although I'm impatient with its deeper import. As for the first, I agree entirely that it remains difficult, often impossible, to discuss publicly within the sociable circles and academic settings that are the strongholds of the American left how wrong most of us were in even our tepid tolerance of the communist dictatorships and our distrust of anticommunism—even that articulated by dissenters from within the Eastern bloc—as inherently right wing. Energetically political people well into the 1980s spoke of these states as worthy places, despite some regrettable abuses of human rights, and then after 1989, without missing a beat, slipped into the Opposition to cheer on workers' uprisings. Old dogmas about the high quality of social services in the socialist countries and the communists' abilities—whatever their problems!—to subordinate ethnic rivalries to the requirements of coherent national entities still surface as vague and confused nostalgia.

So Genovese has done us all a service by raising these questions. Whether his piece moves toward a new sort of politics or replicates the very structures of authoritarianism he now repudiates is another matter. There is a vanguardist and self-important cast to his polemic, an elision of personal recantation with the great drama of world revolution that seems to me entirely of a piece with familiar, worn, moral narratives of the left, old and new. Is Genovese apologizing? And to whom? The millions of dead?

But how much does it cost to apologize to the millions of dead, an abstraction—if a moving one—especially if you have never in actuality (at least insofar as the author tells us) killed one of these detainees, camp inmates, dissidents, or running dogs, never actually raised a hand to give the signal, dealt a blow, pulled the trigger? Can it be easier to apologize to the millions of dead than, say, to your mother, your child, your colleague?

In his life as a supporter of international revolution, Genovese neither worked in the service of the KGB, nor in the torturers' cells, nor on the judge's bench meting out sentences, nor on the killing fields slaughtering rivals; rather, he was a college professor in the United States, teaching, writing and debating primarily matters of American history. Whatever checks he wrote, petitions he signed, positions he endorsed about world and domestic affairs need to be placed along this everyday work in the academy. It's the absence of any second thoughts on the latter that bothers me.

Would he like to say he was wrong about anything closer to home? Are there amends to friends, students, co-workers he wants to make? How does his acknowledgment of what were once called "errors" change his understanding of the justice of his ferocious attacks on those who disagreed with him in matters of history, since he habitually drew on Marxism and the connections between politics and intellectual work to buttress those attacks and condemnations? Adam Michnik: "We must trust the voice of our conscience more than that of all abstract speculations and not invent other responsibilities than the one to which the voice calls us."

I am suspicious of a *mea culpa* whose main purpose is to castigate others. A literature of conscience, which Genovese rightly believes critical to renovating the American left, need be, to my mind, founded in reflection and humility. George Konrád: "Peacemaking is not a phrase . . . it implies reflection, introspection, and cultural criticism of the most intensive kind." Genovese cites chapter and

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verse of the Bible, always a useful source for humility, but for something more contemporary, I treasure the Eastern Europeans—Michnik and Konrad among them—who write from the very heart of devastation, not with recrimination and a new set of certainties but with irony, mild manners, an acute awareness of human frailty, and an absolute refusal of heroism, including the heroics of failure. Above all, I recommend to Genovese the Polish poet Zbigniew Herbert and his persona Mr. Cogito, bumbler, weakling, and anti-hero, who ducks for cover when he finds himself in the proximity of:

> those who are standing at the top of the stairs
> know
> they know everything . . .
> . . .who clench their fists
> brandish chains
> talk and ask questions
> in a fever of excitement . . .

Sean Wilentz

Eugene Genovese's essay is an uneasy mixture of expiation and accusation, and so it elicits a mixed response. In challenging American leftists to face up to an overdue reckoning with history and morality, he says some things that badly need saying. In subtle and not-so-subtle ways, the intellectual fallout of the communist movement (and of its apologists and offshoots) lives on in large portions of the American left, including portions supported and led by professed anti-Stalinists and by people born after Stalin's death. I remember an argument I had a few years back with a young leftist editor, who angrily took me to task for referring, in draft, to a well-known scholar and member of the Communist party as a Communist. "Old Leftist," I learned, was the approved term; to call a Communist a Communist, even matter-of-factly, was to indulge in red-baiting. It was a minor episode (and as I recall I eventually got my way), but it was not and is not unusual. The editor's anger was indicative of a larger syndrome of evasion, euphemism, and self-delusion—a sort of doughface mentality—that continues to afflict many American "progressives" on the subject of communism, past and present. Genovese, in his confession, tries to confront that mentality, and that is all to the good.

Agreeing with Genovese's explanation for this syndrome, especially his blanket condemnation of radical egalitarianism, is another matter. Here he has dissolved his old intellectual ties less thoroughly than he suggests. According to the communist left, important currents of radical egalitarianism, particularly those that stress individualism and personal freedom from an overweening state, are best understood as objectively reactionary—deviationist, crypto-bourgeois, and otherwise lacking in sufficient revolutionary clarity, ardor, and discipline. Genovese has renounced his procommunism, yet he retains some of his old antipathies. The difference is that all of the radical egalitarians whom his old movement grouped among the *betrayers* of revolutionary leftism now get grouped among the *tyrants* of revolutionary leftism, or among the apologists for tyranny. Remarkably, he has switched sides but kept many of the same enemies.

Genovese blends these assertions with a highly questionable, schematic account of the past. Throughout history, he avers, radical egalitarianism and egalitarians have repeatedly (and, he implies, inevitably) wound up justifying mass murder and despotism. We all know the evidence in support of this view. But what, then, are we to make of the greatest radical egalitarian of the eighteenth century, Thomas Paine, who helped foment an American Revolution that brought no Reign of Terror, and who risked the guillotine in proclaiming his opposition to the regicidal French Jacobin tyranny? What are we to make of the feminist radical Elizabeth Cady Stanton? Does the shade of totalitarianism really lurk behind her

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attacks on organized Christianity or her celebrations of the solitude of self? Like all political leaders, Eugene V. Debs and Norman Thomas made their share of political mistakes. So far as I know, these did not include complicity in mass murder.

And as long as we are getting down to cases, what about this magazine? Like Genovese, the founding editors and writers of *Dissent* learned early on the essential truth about Bolshevism—but that knowledge led them to draw moral and political conclusions very different from his, and to act accordingly. Since then, *Dissent* has been steadfastly anticommunist (not merely "anti-Stalinist"), skeptical of third world revolutionism, and critical of the kind of doughface progressivism that Genovese now ridicules. For its troubles, *Dissent* and its friends have been treated to the continuing hostility of the tone-setting radical pundits and "theoreticians" of the Old Left, the New Left, and the Multicultural Left. Genovese—who in his former self was among the hostile—says nothing about this, which is a shame. I can practically hear Irving Howe's icy retort: "Exactly what *do* you mean by *we*, Professor Genovese?"

Still, to linger on a self-righteous note would be foolish. Genovese's old movement may be dead (although not without some frightening exceptions, principally in China and North Korea). In contrast, the democratic socialist movement can claim, at best, to be moribund, as it has been for many years. Contrary to some wishful thinking early on, Soviet communism's demise has not led the people of the world to rush headlong toward the true light of social democracy. Quite the reverse. And waxing prideful about an honorable anticommunist record will not change the situation. Nor is it likely to end the confusion about fundamental ideas, including what socialism even means anymore. (Ask at random any three editors of *Dissent* what *we* mean by socialism, and you are likely to receive at least three different answers.)

From what he has written, however, I doubt that I would find Genovese's ideal social order at all agreeable—for it strikes me that although he has at long last renounced Stalin, he may be moving rather too hastily from supporting one form of authoritarian organicism, communism, toward supporting another. What that other form is remains vague, but his essay contains some hints: his passing praise of Burkean traditionalism (with no mention of its monarchical and aristocratic foundations), his conflation of *all* forms of radical egalitarianism with perfectionist tyranny. Let us acknowledge that, in his pro-Soviet days, Genovese's politics, with their chilling defects, helped him to elucidate brilliantly the southern conservative critiques of liberalism, individualism, and capitalism. Now I wonder if, in outraged reaction to the more baleful tendencies of contemporary leftism, he is becoming at heart largely a southern conservative (minus, of course, the traditional racism)—which, on reflection, may not mark so great a transformation as one might have thought.

Genovese has raised some of the most difficult and painful questions about morality, human frailty, and what it means to be an American leftist. Those questions deserve answers. May he stick around to argue about them.

Transit
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The Riposte

Eugene D. Genovese

Confessions? Apologies? Nothing could be further from my mind. It has never occurred to me to apologize to anyone for the content of my life, which I would have judged on its balance of good and evil. I share Christine Stansell's respect for the healthy attitude displayed by people like Adam Michnik and only regret that I should have given any other impression.

Please understand: I am not as much concerned with crimes of yesterday as with the crimes of the present and with the future of the American left. Thus, I expected Eric Foner and Alice Kessler-Harris to do everything in their power to obfuscate the issues, for they rank among the leaders of the thinly disguised totalitarianism in which the American left wallows. Foner, as is his wont, refers to my ill-tempered polemic against Herbert Aptheker of thirty years ago without mentioning my subsequent essays on Aptheker and my assessment of the destructive features of our quarrels. He accuses me of personal attacks. Much depends on what means "personal." Where and when have I invoked the personal filth that his political faction routinely pours over me and especially my wife?

The gambit advanced by Foner and Kessler-Harris is transparent. Instead of debating the current actions and political future of the left, let us debate Genovese: his authoritarian personality, his vile temper, his apostasy, his elitism. Suppose I plead guilty to all charges and confess to being a scoundrel. Could we then get back to business? And business includes the use of flagrant mendacity in political struggles. Foner is dissembling shamelessly. We knew each other well, worked together, and never disagreed on the communist movement or the Soviet Union or the principal issues of world politics. His pro-Sovietism matched my own year by year. Yet when challenged by Bernard Bellush to clarify his political position, Foner replied, "Evidently, Mr. Bellush deems [me] insufficiently anti-Communist" (*New York Times Book Review*, Jan. 10, 1993). "Insufficiently" anticommunist? Never anticommunist at all, he refuses to acknowledge the burden of the urgent political question he was asked.

Whatever my sins, I tried to fight against the importation of Stalinist methods into our own movement and therefore opposed attempts to impose our partisan will on our colleagues in the historical associations. In contrast, Foner led that successful effort to get the Organization of American Historians to condemn apartheid in South Africa. Wilborne Washburne resolutely (and vainly) attempted to expose the hypocrisy by offering an amendment to condemn "necklacing." Well, where does Foner stand now? Did he, in fact, at any point in his career publicly criticize the communist movement or any part of the left for its atrocities? Did he ever once defend conservatives whose academic freedom was being violated? Does he now publicly criticize the gross violations of academic freedom and common decency that are being committed on our campuses? Have he or the other leaders of the OAH he mentions protested against Howard University's refusal to let David Brion

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Davis, a recent past president of the OAH, speak on campus?

Alice Kessler-Harris worked with me on *Marxist Perspectives*, which had close relations with several European Communist parties. She, like Foner, willingly accepted me as editor in full knowledge of my politics, which I never hid from anyone. Not once during the thirty years or so of our association did she challenge my stance on communism, the Soviet Union, or international affairs. If she was an anticommunist during all those years, when, where, and how did she speak as such? But let us talk about the present: would her Women's Studies Program hire—or even encourage its students to read the work of—scholars with conservative, antifeminist, or dissident-feminist views? Has she not supported the disgraceful attempts to silence contrary voices? Do her political actions differ from those of frank totalitarians?

Fortunately, honest critics are facing the immediate issues. Thus, Robin Kelley soberly asks if I propose a hierarchy of body count and punishment. No. I share his concern that any such feint is likely to end with the whitewashing of the crimes and injustices suffered especially by black people today. Conservatives especially like to play that game, which permits them to bear with equanimity the misery of others, and I have long insisted that some such tendency seriously undermines the claims of Burkeanism.

Kelley notes that "while much of his critique should not be dismissed," the Organization of American Historians had long excluded Jews, women, and people of color, who now have a platform from which to speak. Yes, I know. And, as he should know, as president of the OAH, I fought hard for that reformation, only to be denounced by the radical feminists for allegedly opposing what I in fact vigorously and successfully supported. But is it not true that the opening of our associations to, say, women has meant their opening to women who accept the radical political line or remain silent? Do not office and patronage depend on litmus tests for adherence to, or silence about, the politicization of the organizations? Are first-rate women scholars like Gertrude Himmelfarb, to say nothing of feminists who openly criticize the radicals, tolerated?

Kelley ends, magnificently, by asking us all to take stock of our campus behavior today. I would ask that he reflect further on the "stupid resolution" to which he refers. Will you now ask that it be rescinded? Will you demand that the OAH openly evaluate the circumstances that led to its passage and to the transformation of the OAH into a partisan political organization? Is it not clear that all such political resolutions and related actions have had less to do with the issues supposedly at hand than with making the associations inhospitable to those with different political views?

The left will have to clean up its act if it wishes to survive or deserve to survive. We will fail if we do not reexamine our longstanding premises. And here I fear that I sorely and understandably irritated Mitchell Cohen by seeming to lump social democrats and liberals with Stalinists. When I spoke of a measure of shared responsibility, I intended no equation. I am concerned with a reexamination of concepts and values shared by the left as a whole. Cohen writes that his preferred portion of the left "refused to call socialist anything not truly democratic." Well, why not? Socialism, like capitalism, is a socioeconomic system, and I see no theoretical or historical reason to believe that socialism must be democratic. But what do "socialism" and "democracy" mean? Do we not need to reexamine those meanings?

Cohen charges me with being "en route from one belief system to another when a little agnosticism might be in order." I wish he would identify that other belief system. I thought "a little agnosticism" was precisely what I was calling for when I suggested that we reexamine our own first principles and give a respectful hearing to those of others. When I write on religion I always carefully identify myself as an atheist. I have suggested that we atheists have a good deal to learn from Christian ethics and ought to engage Cornel West and others in a respectful debate. Yes, I know the history of atrocities committed by

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Christians; but where outside the Christian West did concepts of personal freedom and of limits to state authority arise and flourish? These matters bear heavily on contemporary concerns. For secularists as well as Christians need to sort out carefully the relation between philosophical ideals and political performance in order to determine the extent to which the one has followed inexorably from the other.

Cohen wonders where I have stood on certain questions. He will find the record clear. I have always insisted that we of the left may claim for ourselves no rights that we are not prepared to grant others and have defended the academic freedom of conservatives as well as leftists. Repeatedly, I have called upon the left to take a principled stand on such issues, only to be greeted by silence.

I supported the communist movement and the Soviet Union because I was convinced of the moral as well as material superiority of socialism over capitalism—convinced that the socialist countries could and would reform themselves and end their political brutality while preserving socialism itself. I was wrong. But I also argued that we must engage in practices that would prepare us for a socialist America that respected freedom and diversity. That was the theme of my essay "On Antonio Gramsci," which first appeared in *Studies on the Left* and became the centerpiece for my book *In Red and Black*.

I served on the editorial board of *Science & Society* in the late 1950s and was instrumental in opening its pages to Trotskyists, social democrats, and others. I first met Irving Howe at that time, having sought him out to plead that he and his comrades join us in an effort to overcome old hostilities and make a new beginning. Subsequently, I published a number of political pieces, from *The Future of Freedom in an International Civil War* to "Critical Legal Studies as Radical Politics and Ideology" (*Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities*, 1991) and *The Southern Tradition* (in press). Taken with other items, they provide the rudiments of my own answer to The Question. I do believe that socialism is finished but am no more enamored of capitalism than I ever was. The technological and economic revolution through which we are living is creating vast problems that will, in all probability, be settled through one or another form of social corporatism. Thus I can appreciate Sean Wilentz's concern about the implications of my social corporatism, but I suspect that he and I would not be far apart about the kind of corporatism we want. For without a firm measure of democracy and personal freedom the corporatism we are likely to get would be a nightmare.

I have here attacked "radical egalitarianism," as I have for decades. Cohen asks if the radicalism of the civil rights workers was not justified by the injustices they had to confront in a system that offered no redress. Yes, it was justified. For that matter, he may wish to consult my defense of revolutionary violence in *From Rebellion to Revolution*. What any of this tells us about "radical egalitarianism" escapes me.

In the last few years I have published some harsh critiques of the behavior of the left on our campuses and have been astonished by the extent of the private encouragement and support I have received from both old and new leftists, who, alas, continue their public silence. So *pace* Mitchell Cohen and Sean Wilentz. If I have slighted the record of the social democrats, I shall repent and reform. Meanwhile, permit me to point out that I have been trying to raise these questions on the left for more than a quarter century, only to have them ignored or to find myself pilloried. Admit it: this time I got your attention.

May we now put the autobiographies, confessions, and other sideshows to rest and reexamine critically the principles and practices of a left worthy of respect and support? To rebuild a credible left we shall have to reexamine our understanding of "democracy," "equality," "social justice" and other code words. On these matters we do have some deep disagreements, but they may well turn out to be smaller than they seem, once we get down to a careful and comradely debate on the specifics. □

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Paul Wapner

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVISM AND GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY

Earth Day 1970 marked the beginning of the modern environmental movement. Twenty million Americans gathered to demonstrate their distress over the state of the environment. Their message was historically distinct. In the past, environmental concern revolved mainly around establishing and protecting wilderness areas for aesthetic and recreational purposes. On Earth Day 1970, it involved safeguarding the biophysical quality of life. People spoke out about oil spills, urban smog, toxic dumping and dwindling resources. They protested the use of pesticides, the killing of whales, and the production of radioactive wastes. They complained, in short, about the increasingly degraded quality of air, water, and soil, and worried out loud about its impact on human life.

Although Earth Day was a predominantly American experience, it spurred recognition that environmental problems were not limited to the United States. Throughout the late 1960s and early 1970s, environmentalists emphasized that air, water, shifting soils and migratory animals—to say nothing of the stratospheric ozone layer or the global carbon cycle—transcend national boundaries. The United States could not adequately protect its territory without encouraging others to do the same. In short, environmentalism went global. Protecting a riverbed could not be separated from saving the planet.

Over the next two decades, environmental activists increasingly worked across national boundaries. Groups opened offices in many countries, directing their efforts to global environmental protection. The largest of these organizations, such as Greenpeace, Friends of the Earth (FOE) and World Wildlife Fund (WWF), operated throughout the world. They became genuinely transnational in character.

Millions of people now belong to transnational environmental groups. The budgets of the largest organizations are greater than the amounts most countries spend on environmental issues and at least three times more than the United Nations Environmental Program (UNEP) spends annually for its work. Greenpeace has close to six million members worldwide and an operating budget of over one hundred million dollars. World Wildlife Fund has over three million members and an annual budget of over one hundred and seventy million dollars. Friends of the Earth has five hundred thousand members and spends roughly two million dollars a year. These organizations are not puny; they represent powerful forces in world environmental affairs.

Perhaps more remarkably, these organizations are fashioning a new type of politics. They rely on familiar strategies of lobbying and pressuring governments. But they also invest themselves in the social, economic, and cultural dimensions of global life that lie outside the realm of governmental affairs. One might call their work "world civic politics."

Civil society is that domain of human affairs

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lying between the individual and the state. It is the network of economic, social and cultural practices based on friendship, family, private property, and voluntary affiliation.

Recent years have seen concerted efforts to politicize civil society. Feminist groups, for instance, argue that patriarchy pervades all levels of association. It operates in the marketplace and bedroom as well as in congresses and parliaments. For feminist activists, the public/private distinction, which identifies the political with the state, is an obfuscation of political reality. Likewise, in their early years, Solidarity in Poland and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia recognized that political life was not captured completely by state activities but rather extended into society itself. Horizontal networks involving church activities, savings associations, literary ventures and the like thus became forums for political action. Solidarity and Charter 77 were successful, many believe, because they politicized civil society.

Transnational environmental groups seek the same scrambling of state and society, only on a global level. Friends of the Earth, Conservation International, and Earth Island Institute, for example, devote significant amounts of time to politicizing realms of collective life lying outside the grip of nation-states. They foster global civil society. Their aim is to identify and manipulate levers of power, which, although not associated with governments *per se*, effectively shape, order, and direct collective behavior.

Greenpeace started in a Unitarian church in Vancouver in 1971. A group of people were sitting around trying to figure out how to stop the United States from testing nuclear weapons on Amchitka in the Aleutian Islands. The United States had already detonated one bomb and planned a number of future tests. The group had been meeting informally for over a year and saw itself as the only organization willing to object to the testing. At one point, a member said, "Why the hell doesn't somebody just sail a boat up there and park right next to the bomb? That's something everybody can understand."

The idea caught on. Over the next few months, the group managed to send two ships toward the test site. The first was forced to retreat after the test was postponed. The second ship, although better stocked and funded, was far from Amchitka at the time of the test. Notwithstanding the failure of both ships to stop the detonations, what had appeared as failure actually proved to be a success of the very sort Greenpeace has enjoyed through subsequent years. Both voyages garnered extensive media coverage in Canada and the United States. According to Robert Hunter, each ship was seen as a "mind bomb sailing across an electronic sea into the minds of the masses." By the time the second ship arrived home, thousands of people had joined Greenpeace opposition to the tests.

Greenpeace soon expanded its concerns. Throughout the 1970s it worked to protect marine mammals and became famous for its attempts to confront whalers on the high seas. Since then it has focused on almost every environmental issue with transboundary implications—including oil spills, toxic dumping, deforestation, climate change, ozone depletion, and acid rain. Over this same period of time, Greenpeace has grown enormously. In 1972 it had only a single office in Vancouver. It now staffs offices in thirty countries and a research base in Antarctica. Its "eco-navy" consists of eight ships, and it owns a helicopter and a hot-air balloon. It currently employs over a thousand full-time staff members, plus hundreds of part-timers, and thousands of volunteers.

Greenpeace chiefly wages its campaigns in world civic politics through "direct actions." These include positioning activists between harpooners and whales, plugging up industrial discharge pipes, parachuting from smokestacks and floating a hot-air balloon into a nuclear test site. None of these activities involves lobbying a government *per se* or calling for a particular policy change on the part of specific countries. Instead, the aim is to instill a sense of outrage among the largest audience possible.

Greenpeace's direct actions are based on the

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notion of "bearing witness." This type of political action, originating with the Quakers, links moral sensitivities with political responsibility. Having observed a morally objectionable act, one cannot turn away in avoidance. One must either take action to prevent further injustice or stand by and attest to its occurrence. When Greenpeace confronts whalers on the high seas or blocks railway cars carrying toxic substances or plugs up discharge pipes, it bears witness, in the most public way possible, to ecological injustice. The idea is to invite the public to bear witness as well, to enable people throughout the world to become informed about ecological dangers, pique their sense of outrage, and spur them to action.

In the 1970s, Greenpeace ships had to use Morse code to communicate with their offices on land. After weeks at sea, they returned with only still photographs to document instances of environmental harm. Today, Greenpeace ships use telephones, fax machines, satellite uplinks, and video cameras. Video footage may be sent almost immediately to media sources throughout the world. Greenpeace can distribute edited, scripted, and narrated video news spots to television stations in eighty-eight countries within hours.

Greenpeace's actions rarely come with messages to call your congressperson or pressure local government officials. In fact, in many of the countries in which Greenpeace operates, such political expression is not an option. Rather, Greenpeace is attempting to inculcate and disseminate a sensitivity to environmental affairs and inspire people to take action in the service of environmental protection.

When David Brower founded Friends of the Earth in 1969, it had a single office in San Francisco and only a handful of staff working mostly as volunteers. Today it has local chapters in 51 countries. Unlike at Greenpeace, its individual offices enjoy much autonomy. While there is a central administrative body coordinating FOE actions worldwide, each office is basically on its own to choose issue areas, devise strategies and carry out activities. Friends of the Earth publishes an international newsletter for all chapters and holds meetings throughout the year for its representatives from around the world.

Friends of the Earth's initial contribution to environmental activism was to address a number of issues on which other organizations had yet to focus. FOE began the first serious study of alternative energy policies (pushing a soft-energy path relying on non-nuclear renewables); it was the first group to work against acid rain; and it was one of the first to define the threat of nuclear war as an environmental issue. The group's most important strength, however, has been and continues to be its global reach. Through its offices in fifty-one countries, the organization monitors developments worldwide. As with the British Empire of old, the sun never sets on Friends of the Earth.

In 1989, FOE and thirteen other environmental organizations formed the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economics (CERES). CERES produced a ten-point environmental code of conduct for corporations. This code includes commitments to waste reduction, damage compensation, and disclosure of environmentally harmful practices. These commitments have become known as the Valdez Principles, inspired by the Exxon *Valdez* oil spill.

FOE exerts similar pressures on development banks. The World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and a host of other institutions, including the Inter-American, Asian, and African Development Banks, lend large sums for economic development. In 1989 and 1990, the World Bank alone lent roughly twenty-one billion dollars. For years these institutions operated without recognizing the environmental impact of their projects. Many of their undertakings, such as dams and forest-to-farmland enterprises, actually end up wreaking environmental destruction in recipient countries.

FOE has been at the forefront of forcing these institutions to weigh the environmental implications of their activities. The World Bank, for instance, has increased its environmental staff from three in 1977 and five in the

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mid-1980s to two hundred at present. It has canceled or revised a number of large-scale projects, financed a number of explicitly environmental programs, and assumed responsibility for the Global Environmental Facility. This institution, mandated at the Earth Summit, disburses funds for development projects that directly address global environmental problems. None of this means that the World Bank or any of the other financial institutions has become "green." But it does suggest that each is being pressured to become more sensitive to ecological issues.

Since its establishment in 1961, World Wildlife Fund has grown from a small grant-making organization concerned merely with conservation to a full-fledged transnational environmental activist group with offices in twenty-three countries. Many of these are in the developing world. Activities range from the simple task of building fences around a forest preserve to the more complex one of creating opportunities for sustainable development in environmentally fragile areas. WWF works on a whole host of international and global environmental issues including desertification, climate change and ozone depletion.

Initially, WWF, like other international conservation groups, saw its work as a matter of saving specific species. It was concerned, for example, with protecting the great panda bear, the Bengal tiger and the African elephant, now known as "charismatic species." Despite significant efforts to track, study and research these animals, however, WWF found that their numbers still diminished. What WWF had failed to realize was that individual species cannot be saved without ensuring their habitat. The existence of certain plants, access to water, a predictable climate, and the presence of other animals are all significant to preserving species. With this understanding, WWF began to work for the protection of habitats. It sought to establish wildlife preserves that would protect animals from ecologically detrimental human activity.

This is no easy task. Much of the earth's remaining biological wealth is located in parts of the world where the poorest peoples draw their livelihood from the land. Whether or not such areas are officially designated as parks, the poor and hungry will (rightfully) seek resources to keep themselves alive. Recognizing this, WWF has expanded its conception of conservation to include human needs. This has involved moving beyond governmentally targeted activities to ones focused on the dynamics of social life itself.

Since the late 1980s, for example, WWF has been working in Zambia to set up a game management system involving local residents in antipoaching and conservation efforts. It is proving successful because it links wildlife protection with the economic well-being of local residents. Game management areas draw tourists and safari hunters. Through WWF's efforts, local people staff these areas and receive the revenues from permits and programs associated with the preserve.

World Wildlife Fund has also been working in Cameroon to protect a biologically rich area that cannot be designated as a protected region. Here WWF has been working with local residents to develop tree nurseries for reforestation, reintroduce indigenous crops into the area and share information on the long-term effects of ecologically insensitive practices. It aims to enable local people to be agriculturally productive without harming the ecological integrity of the area. Finally, WWF has been working in St. Lucia to protect the coastal region from environmental damage. This involves lending technical assistance for communal waste disposal, improving the ability of people to market their fish catch to reduce overfishing, and planting fast growing fuelwood trees to protect mangroves that have traditionally served as fire wood.

In each of these projects, WWF has been working with local people and, for the most part, bypassing governments. WWF recognizes that wildlife protection depends foremost on local communities empowered to undertake their own sustainable development. Although local inhabitants of biologically stressed areas may know little about ozone depletion, the greenhouse effect or worldwide deforestation, they know all too well the direct human

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consequences of ecological destruction. Working directly with them rather than through governments is critical to protecting some of the most ecologically important regions in the world.

In the 1970s, as environmental concern expanded beyond conservation and began to focus on the biophysical dimension of life, activist strategies broadened. To establish a wilderness or forest preserve, pressuring governments is a logical approach. With the inclusion of other concerns, however, the limitations of government efforts became clear. Toxic wastes, increased population pressures, overfishing, smog, and extinction of species are not solely matters of governmental regulation. They have to do with consumption patterns, reproductive practices, technological imperatives, life-style choices and widespread poverty—none of which are completely amenable to government directives.

In the 1960s, the U.S. Navy and Air Force used whales for target practice. Twenty-five years later an international effort costing five million dollars was mounted to save three whales trapped in ice in Alaska. Two decades ago corporations produced products with little regard for their environmental impact. Today, it is incumbent upon corporations to reduce environmental impact at the production, packaging, and distribution phases of industry. When multilateral development banks and other aid institutions were formed after the Second World War, environmental impact assessments were unheard of. Today, they are commonplace. Finally, in the 1960s few people gave thought to the idea of linking environment and development, or to pursuing what is now called sustainable development. Today, these are almost household phrases.

In each of these cases, changes have taken place that are not driven by governmental policies and directives. These changes reflect the efforts of environmental groups to act in global civil society. Whether they disseminate an ecological sensibility by publicizing instances of environmental harm, rewrite the terms of good corporate conduct, challenge traditional understandings of development aid, or expand the notion of wildlife conservation to include sustainable life-styles, transnational environmental groups are reshaping environmental action. They are discovering, or more accurately nurturing, a sphere of collective life that is, perhaps fortunately, resistant to government influence. As they attempt to identify and engage these opportunities, "saving the planet" becomes an exercise in world civic politics. □

dissent

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Michael Rustin

INCOMPLETE MODERNITY: ULRICH BECK'S "RISK SOCIETY"

There is good reason to fear that "postmodern" and "postindustrial" currents of thought will sweep away the foundations of existing radical critiques without offering anything very substantial in their place. It is all very well to criticize social democracy, the welfare state, trade unionism, and social classes as agents of change, but what other institutions does the left have to depend on once these have been thrown into crisis? In the circumstances it is reasonable to hang on to what remains of these frameworks of critical thought on a principle of theoretical economy: don't abandon an established theory until one appears that offers superior explanations and strategies.

Ulrich Beck's remarkable book *Risk Society* (London: Sage, 1992), however, gives one cause to think again about whether a new model might not be available for understanding our times—and in a not unhopeful spirit. Beck's book, published in Germany in 1986 and successful enough there to have sold more than sixty thousand copies and turned its author into a regular columnist for the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, is characteristically West German in its formation. It is informed theoretically by Habermas and his critical account of modernity, which Beck turns to his own original purpose; by the antiproductionist concerns of the Greens, who have acquired in West Germany a unique degree of representation and influence; and by a well-grounded sociology of German society that is highly sensitive to contradiction and disequilibrium.

Beck describes an epochal shift, now in mid-course, from "industrial society" to what he calls "risk society." "We are therefore concerned no longer exclusively with making nature useful, or with releasing mankind from traditional constraints, but also and essentially with problems resulting from techno-economic development itself. Modernization is becoming *reflexive*; it is becoming its own theme." His argument, which is addressed primarily to a new radical public of the left, reinterprets what others see as the development of a "postmodern" order as instead the next stage of modernity. Whereas most postmodern theorists are critical of grand narrative, general theory, and human emancipation, Beck remains committed to all of these. Where for many contemporary philosophers, "rationality" has become synonymous with a "discourse" devoid of absolute norms or foundations, Beck's concept of "reflexive modernity" implies the attainability of rational consensus once the conditions for democratic deliberation are created. In "reflexive modernity," which embeds Habermas's rather abstract idea of critical reason in the concrete social world, Beck evokes the possibility of a fully conscious, rational society, able to take responsibility for its development and for its relationship to nature.

The "risks" of Beck's title are in the first instance ecological, the unforeseeable and barely controllable consequences for human life of the scientific and technological revolutions. But more original than his somewhat rhetorical discussion of these risks is his re-reading of the process of modernization and

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of "modernity" itself. He offers a remarkable synthesis of changes taking place in many spheres—work, science, politics, class, and family. These institutional sectors each manifest similar attributes of partially realized rationality. Although Beck links some institutions in causal terms—arguing for example that the subordination of women in the family is a function of male domination of the work sphere—it is the idea of an incompletely realized rationality, manifest in various institutional settings, that holds his historical model together. Beck presents this as a theory of "post-industrial modernity."

> Just as modernization dissolved the structure of feudal society in the nineteenth century, and produced the industrial society, modernization today is dissolving industrial society and another modernity is coming into being . . . the counter-modernistic scenario currently upsetting the world—new social movements and criticism of science, technology and progress—does not stand in contradiction of modernity, but is rather an expression of reflexive modernization. . . .

Beck's idea (he says that the reader might see between the lines the sparkling lake beside which he wrote his book) is that modernity is still essentially incomplete. "We are witnessing not the end but the beginning of modernity—that is of a modernity beyond its classical industrial design."

Beck develops this argument by demonstrating the numerous features of the premodern world that have continued as essential structures of industrial society, but that are now progressively called into question. He provides a synoptic reading of a wide range of industrial institutions, seeing these as aspects of an essentially incomplete and arrested process of modernization. It is his separation of the industrial from the modern, and his positing of a further stage of "reflexive rationality" within each of these social spheres, that makes this book the pathbreaking synthesis that it is. It is worth looking at each of these institutional spheres in turn.

A key case is the position of women in industrial society, which Beck describes as a kind of ascribed feudal dependency, organized by the sacralized institution of the family, dedicated to unequal gender relations. Various changes are undermining women's dependent "feudal" status, which was linked in the premodern ideology of patriarchy to a wider system of social subordination. These include increasing life expectancy—the "demographic liberation of women"; restructured and intensively capitalized housework; the tendency to *intentional* motherhood, via the availability of family planning and abortion; the equalization of educational opportunity; the frequency of divorce and separation, freeing women from lifelong support by husbands and often threatening them with poverty as a result; and the increased entry of women into the labor market, linked to all the above processes. "These changes express the liberation of women from the dictates of their modern female status fate."

A second dimension of this analysis is the declining significance of class and status. Beck's argument is that both Marx's and Weber's accounts of the salience of class and status are far more relevant to industrial than they are to "reflexively modern" societies like ours. Men and women are positioned by modern economic systems as individuals, not as class subjects. New flexibility in the work process and the differentiation and globalization of consumption patterns are dissolving the cultural solidarities of class systems, especially in West Germany and in Scandinavia. (Beck makes an exception that may no longer be correct for the United Kingdom: class solidarities now seem to have eroded there too). "To put it in Marxist terms," he says, "we increasingly confront the phenomenon of a capitalism *without* classes, but with individualized social inequality and all the related social and political problems." (This in fact seems to be more a post-Marxist than a Marxist definition of the situation.)

The persuasiveness of this argument is theoretical as much as empirical. In Beck's thesis, class solidarities derived from the survival within industrial societies of the status hierarchies of feudalism. Class memberships and identities reworked preexisting senses of

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social difference and subordination, sometimes giving them a different direction (relations of opposition rather than submission), but nevertheless building on what was perceived as the naturalness of status divisions to construct the class cultures of industrial society. Not only status inequality, but even the utopian responses to it—the socialist idea of equality itself—were products of the pre-bourgeois social order. It was the truncating and dispersal of this feudal history that made American society so different and apparently "abnormal." North America seems, once again, the vanguard of modernity, not an aberration from the European norm, as socialists used to see it.

In the light of this thesis, one might say that the process of normative emancipation involved in "modernity"—the idea that rights and opportunities should be available to all individuals, regardless of birth or class position—undermines the solidarities of class on which the idea of equality has depended as its collective bearer. Once "subordinate class subjects" cease to feel subordinate or inferior in their sense of self-worth—once they have achieved a certain level of emancipation—class and status memberships are felt to be demeaning, part of the problem of inequality and injustice rather than a collective resource for solving it. Whereas in the earlier postwar period, claims of social justice were mostly asserted in collectivist terms, during the 1980s it has proved politically effective to invoke the idea of individual rights *against* existing forms of social provision—for example the welfare state, trade unions—which had earlier seemed their main guarantors. In this sense the Thatcherite revolution in Britain, and perhaps the parallel right-wing ascendancy in the United States, was an authentically "modernizing" movement, appropriating in populist and individualist terms universal claims that had in their more collectivized version belonged to the political left.

Just as the family is viewed in this perspective of "reflexive modernity" as a "feudal" survival, so the institutions of the welfare compromise (and those of state socialism in the East) have been revealed by their recent crises to be deeply compromised by inegalitarian, bureaucratic, and indeed authoritarian attributes. Although these institutions were claimed to be instruments of social justice, they also unavoidably served as distributors of unequal advantage to middle-class consumers. While ostensibly devoted to ideals of public service, they also advanced the interests of their professional functionaries. The populist right was thus able to appeal successfully to the people over the heads of the elected or appointed defenders of their interests.

"Socialism," as a project of universal emancipation and equality, is thus being pushed out of its former institutional cradle. Certainly, there is evidence that class identifications and class-based voter alignments are diminishing everywhere in the West. If we want to retain some conception of a possible socialism, it would have to be, in the light of Beck's argument, a "socialism without class."

A third sphere in Beck's thesis of "incomplete modernization" is that of scientific and technological transformation. This is given particular emphasis by his risk-informed perspective. Beck's central antithesis between "classical" and "reflexive" modernization is worked out in the domain of science as the contrast between *wealth production* and *risk production*. His argument is that "while in classical industrial society the 'logic' of wealth production dominates the 'logic' of risk production, in the risk society this relationship is reversed. The productive forces have lost their innocence. . . . The gain in power from techno-economic progress is increasingly overshadowed by the production of risks." Beck argues that these now amount to "*non*-class-specific *global hazards*," the product of a situation where the whole of nature, and the spheres of both production and reproduction, are constituted through science-based interventions.

The most fundamental argument here asserts "the end of the antithesis between nature and society." Whereas the control of nature was seen in the Enlightenment as a means of human liberation, Beck argues that this control has become a source of potential catastrophe.

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Because of this we need to move "from the solidarity of need to solidarity motivated by anxiety"—a potentially classless solidarity because all are equally threatened by the new kinds of risk. There is now no "nature" that is not deeply affected by scientific intervention, and no "society" that is not transformed by the outcomes of science's conquest of nature. It is not merely the so-called "natural world" of forests, climate, species that is affected by technological interventions, but the social world too. Work is being transformed by electronics. The family is threatened by the potential of *in vitro* fertilization and genetic engineering. And of course, technology applied to warfare threatens total destruction. "Risk society is a *catastrophic society. In it the exceptional condition threatens to become the norm.*" At an earlier stage of industrial society, science and technology sometimes did only limited damage, and piecemeal remedies could be sought when such damage occurred. Now, the cumulative effects of scientific interventions provide the agenda for scientific industries. Beck thinks we should be looking holistically at causes, not symptoms: for example, at the environmental causes of diseases, and not drugs to control them; at containing the role of the automobile, not merely cleaning up its engines; at reducing demand for energy, not finding more ways of generating it.

Cumulatively, the litany of "risks" cited by Beck—global warming, chemical toxicity, the extinction of species, radiation, genetic engineering—becomes compelling, though Beck is less sensitive to the cultural and even quasi-religious shaping of this "risk agenda" than he might be.* But more compelling than Beck's enumeration of actual risks is the application of his "incomplete modernity" idea to the whole sphere of scientific discourse. He points out that science's legitimation claims depend on the fallibility of its findings: on rational argument and empirical evidence. Yet, he points out, scientific institutions have normally operated in a twofold manner, exploiting the unquestioned authority of experts in their dealings with the public, while basing this authority on the provisional and falsifiable nature of science in contrast to pre-modern forms of knowledge. What is now happening, argues Beck, is that this bluff is being called. The claims of rational critique asserted in classical modernist mode against premodern beliefs is now being made in a spirit of reflexive modernity against science itself. Faced with "scientific evidence" for or against some project or process, citizens now routinely locate their own sources of qualified advice. Whether the issue be the state of the ozone layer, the population of whales, or toxins in food, there is now invariably more than one informed and articulate side to each debate.

These contests have also made evident that what underlies the arguments among scientists are ethical and social commitments, which set many research agendas in the first place. The "problems" that are now the subject of scientific and political controversy (for example, the implications of nuclear power generation or tropical deforestation) are themselves the outcome of earlier science-based programs of economic and technical development. "Reflexive modernization" brings this entire system and its legitimating ideologies into the sphere of critical debate. This process, Beck suggests, is now so far advanced that science can no longer advance its authority claims in particular spheres without these claims being challenged.

Finally, Beck brings the political sphere within the scope of his "incomplete modernity" thesis. Elective government makes only a small concession, he points out, to the idea of full democratic responsibility.

> Ultimately, the monopolization of democratically constituted decision-making rights is founded on the contradictory image of a *democratic monarchy*. The rules of constitutional democracy are limited to the (infrequent) choice of political representatives and to (minority) participation in forming political programs. Once in office, it is not only the "monarch for a term" who develops

* See Mary Douglas and Aaron Wildavsky's *Risk and Culture* (University of California Press, 1982), for a more skeptical treatment of ecological concerns.

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dictatorial leadership qualities and enforces his decisions in authoritarian fashion from the top down: the agencies, interest groups, and citizens' groups affected by the decisions also forget their rights and become "democratic subjects" who accept without question the state's claims to dominance.

Beck sees this situation as unstable for two opposite reasons. On the one hand, the most important decisions that affect human lives are made not by politicians, but in the dispersed scientific and corporate centers in which technological innovations are planned. It is the development of new forms of production—whether of drugs, electronics, bio-engineering, or machinery—that shape humanity's future, and the state in relation to these is merely an ineffective, post-facto regulator. The declining significance of party politics is in part a recognition of the irrelevance of centralized state structures to technically based changes that are both dispersed and global in their effects.

On the other side, the reflexive practices that are most relevant are also decentralized and specialized, usually taking place within social movements outside the sphere of political parties. The guarantors of a genuinely democratic process are legal rights upholding freedom of expression, mass communications providing access to the public sphere, and educational resources that give citizens some cognitive resource for acting upon their situation. We could add that these "guarantors" are themselves incomplete and frail. Although they assign some rights of democratic participation and deliberation to citizens, they do so in radically unequal ways. In Beck's view, not the redistribution of material resources (he assumes that the welfare state has become somewhat obsolete through its success in guaranteeing standards of life) but safeguards against "risk" have become the central issues.

To respond to these problems, a more dispersed and differentiated kind of politics is called for, not the futile attempt to orchestrate interests into a centralized party system. The crucial institutions are the judiciary, with its potential for protecting citizens and their right to know; the mass media, with the power of publicity; a private sphere allowing space for a "personal politics"; and new citizens' initiatives and social movements, such as those that have been developed in response to ecological dangers. Beck envisages a dispersed and ubiquitous form of participation, pressing "modernity" to the point where all claims can be questioned and choices based on rational deliberation take the place of habitual conformity. Society is seen as evolving toward a variety of networks, linked laterally as well as vertically, rather than as hierarchical chains of command. Beck's argument has affinities with the theses of "Post-Fordism" and of "Disorganized Capitalism."* He argues in an interesting practical conclusion for the importance of information disclosure and self-criticism. "The right to criticism within professions and organizations, like the right to strike, ought to be fought for and protected in the public interest." One reason for this is that risks cannot be detected, let alone methods found to avoid them, without technical expertise. Beck suggests that there needs to be a "medical parliament," to debate the ethics of new medical technologies.

How convincing is Beck's theory of "reflexive modernity"? It has great merit as an account of the contradiction between the normative claims generated within industrial societies and the limits that its institutions impose on these claims. Beck's view of industrial society as a merely partial modernization is a powerful one. One can thereby see the crisis of several institutions of industrial society in a positive way, as their unequal and undemocratic forms become exposed to critique.

Beck is, however, reluctant to acknowledge that some institutions and sources of power in this contemporary system are more influential than others. His critique is directed to "techno-scientific rationality," not the institutional power of capital, as if it is the mode of scientific thinking itself, rather than its spon-

* M.J. Piore and C.F. Sabel, *The Second Industrial Divide* (Basic Books, 1984); S. Lash and J. Urry, *The End of Organised Capitalism* (Polity Press, Cambridge, 1987). Scott Lash provided the introduction to Beck's English edition.

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soring corporate agencies, that is the major agent of change. The economic sphere is often referred to in *Risk Society* as a "techno-economic system," in contrast to the politico-economic realm in which democratic decision making is the supposed norm. Beck consistently avoids making the conventional socialist attributions of power to the forces of capital, seeing these as powerful only in their capacity to mobilize technical change. Yet he still refers to the desirability and feasibility of a "socialism of everyday life."

Following Habermas and a long German tradition, Beck is at root an idealist in his approach. The shaping force in his account of change is the rationalizing mode of thought, which achieved its first partial transformation of the world through "industrial society." This, however, is only a partial step toward a world shaped by human reason. Marshall Berman's epigraph from *The Communist Manifesto*, "All that is solid melts into air," could be the epigraph to Beck's book as well. Beck conceives the remedy for this "melting" in terms of a reflexive rationality, dispersed in a variety of citizen communities with access to legal and cultural resources. A kind of democratic civil society—which is offered as the necessary response to a world of "risk." Not, that is, the capture or reallocation of material and coercive power. Beck might argue that these capitalist forms of power have now been irretrievably dispersed and placed beyond central control. How *could* electronic transfers of money and capital be captured by any existing political agency? There seems to be something missing, however, in an argument that barely poses this question.

Beck defends "modernity" as a still incomplete form of emancipation. He imagines democratic, participative communities taking conscious responsibility for their relations with nature and for the social world. The teleology of his account, the idea that modernity is a continuing, directional process driven by reason, places Beck in opposition to postmodern celebrants of fragmentation, discontinuity, and contingency. A process of reflexive deliberation has to be dispersed throughout civil society if catastrophe is to be avoided.

Yet one can read Beck's analysis in a less optimistic spirit. Although he defends a vision of "modernity" against the fragmentation and incoherence of the "post-modern," it is not clear that he can offer a tenable view of modern social organization at all. Will individuals released from the unquestioned roles and obligations of families, and freed to negotiate their own fundamental relationships, escape loneliness and expendability? Does flexible and casual employment mean that material existence and work will be structurally separated from each other (via a basic income entitlement, for example) or merely that large minorities will once again be forced into economic uncertainty and intermittent poverty? Doesn't the present erosion of "Fordist work patterns" lead mainly to the expulsion of a significant part of the population from any economic role?

Beck suggests that challenges to scientific authority mean that reason is becoming generalized and society more fully reflexive and responsible for its future. An alternative interpretation is that "knowledge" becomes wholly relative to the interests it serves, not a source of insight so much as a weapon in social conflicts. Does the dispersal of political life to Beck's preferred sites—legal contests, media debate, and citizens' networks—compensate for the collapse of the more concentrated "countervailing powers" of parties and labor unions, as defenders of the majority interest?

Another interpretation can be offered of this process. It is not abstract rationality that is the driving force, but the instrumental rationality of capital in particular. It is the commodification of everything that is transforming the world, desacralizing what was formerly sacred (the family, the natural world), breaking up those institutions (welfare states, trade unions, entrenched employment rights) that offered resistance to capital accumulation, instrumentalizing even knowledge itself. The fundamental right on which this system is based, hardly referred to by Beck, is the right to property. It is "shareholder democracy"—one share, one vote, not citizen democracy, "one person, one

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vote"—that rules our world, and reason and science are deployed mainly as its instruments.

Most of the institutional changes that Beck describes--in the family, work, and politics—are the effects of the pervasive intervention of markets into hitherto unpenetrated or resistant spheres. Even "globalization" is driven not merely by technology in the abstract, but by the deployment of technology by corporations for their own purposes. It does not follow from the fact that the earlier institutions of resistance—mass political parties, trade unions, churches, or even national governments—can no longer oppose these processes effectively that some better form of "resistance" in the form of dispersed critique within civil society is waiting to take their place. The forms of mobilization that Beck proposes are undoubtedly good things, but whether they are a match for the capitalist penetration of the world is another matter entirely. If the nation-state has become too weak to contain globalized capital, it may be that we need cooperation between states or supranational states, and that nothing else will do.

Beck describes the dynamics and phenomenology of change in this world of late modernity with an exciting sweep and comprehensiveness. He combines a philosophical commitment to reflexive understanding with a grasp of societal dynamics of the lived world. His book displays a real sociological imagination. Most original is his distinction between "the industrial" and the "modern," and his demonstration of how authoritarian our institutions remain. But there is a silence in his work about the continuing sources of this authority—about the power of capital that seems in fact to be the main obstacle to the diffused spirit of reflectiveness and self-making that Beck imagines as a possible future.

Beck appears to see "modernization" as a process driven by its own immanent logic. His argument lies, via its assimilation by the Frankfurt School and Habermas, in the tradition of Hegel, though he formulates his argument in sociological rather than philosophical terms. It is through the self-determining institutions of civil society, rather than through Hegel's rational state, that the potential of reason is to be realized in Beck's account.

One can see this process of "modernization" being driven not by its own internal logic, but by capital. On this alternative view, which would look to update Marx rather than Hegel, we have a capitalism without classes, ecological catastrophe in place of immiseration. Whether it is possible, in a postscarcity society, to bring this juggernaut of transformation under control, when the agencies that previously most resisted it are so weakened, is the great unanswered question for contemporary radicals. Ulrich Beck formulates this problem in a new and challenging way. But he does not offer a convincing solution to it. □

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James B. Rule

THE CONUNDRUM OF GREEN CONSCIOUSNESS

Concern for the environment is hardly a single mind-set. A look through a few of the many environmental magazines quickly reveals its seemingly infinite permutations and combinations.

At one point on the spectrum, we find down-to-earth journals like *Garbage*, featuring articles on such subjects as mulching and paper recycling. Advertising in *Garbage* comes from companies producing "environmentally compatible" paints and other household products, composting toilets, and solar electric systems.

At another extreme, we have glossy publications like *Earthwatch*, apparently bent on doing for environmentalism what *Playboy* did for a certain vision of sex. *Earthwatch* is largely given over to publicity for ecotourism sponsored by itself. "Act today . . . The world is changing quickly," its appeal runs. "Scientists need your help to assess the condition of the planet." An 800 number is provided. "For more efficient service," readers are advised, "have your credit card ready."

In this varied field, the quarterly *Orion* stands out as strikingly thoughtful and well edited. With a readership of about fourteen thousand (a shade larger than *Dissent*'s), *Orion* carries no advertising at all. It is supported partly by subscriptions ($18 per year) and partly by a private foundation. Along with lavishly reproduced photos of attractive creatures and unspoiled places, one finds in *Orion* such articles as an account of a Northern California venture in sustainable forestry, a long interview with writer-ecologist-farmer Wendell Berry, a theoretical essay by economist Thomas Michael Power on the concept of wealth, and a reprint of an essay from the 1930s by pioneer environmental writer Aldo Leopold. A consistent high point is the witty and well-written column by Rutgers environmental scholar David Ehrenfield.

Perhaps because its analytical content is high, *Orion* makes it plain that environmentalists are much clearer about what they are *against* than what they are for. By way of opposition, environmental activists can readily join in disapproving despoilation of the natural world, or in combating attacks on its natural beauty and diversity of life forms. Such oppositions provide a ready agenda; the targets are ever present and easy to spot.

More elusive is agreement on any systematic rationale for an alternative to these things—and, *a fortiori*, for a vision of what those on the left would call a praxis. How much, and what kind, of a reversal of human efforts to dominate nature would count as success? What would count as an acceptable, sustainable "steady state" in relations between the human and nonhuman world? And how much of the tactics and techniques of bureaucratic action should those seeking environmental redress be prepared to embrace on behalf of their cause?

These issues recur in *Orion*—and not just in the realm of abstraction. For example, the Winter 1991 edition carried a letter from the publisher noting that he "hoped to be able to afford coated recycled paper" in the magazine's four-color section. A reader found the statement unsatisfactory. "What you mean . . .," the reader wrote, "is that you hope to be able to pay for that paper." But, he continued, it is

> non-recycled paper or other environmentally

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> unsound products [that] are not affordable if we think in planetary terms. While you might be paying less for the paper you are now using, this does not obviate the longer term damages to the planet resulting from the production and disposal of environmentally unsound products. The costs are not usually seen directly by us, but are largely passed on to our children.

Few, if any, of *Orion*'s readers—and, I imagine, few of *Dissent*'s—would fault the principle cited at the end of this quotation. But the principle itself is hardly an open-and-shut guide to practice. Virtually any form of environmental action, from lobbying one's elected representatives to publishing a magazine, involves some degree of participation in processes that place demands on the ecosystem—whose effects on future generations are hard to reckon. Means absolutely consistent with ends are as elusive for environmental politics as for the political left.

Orion's publisher, perhaps chastened by this exchange, later announced a new strategy in the magazine's efforts to raise its readership. To avoid excessive environmental costs, the magazine would give up mass mailings. Instead, readers would be asked to make direct, personal appeals and to offer gift subscriptions.

No one who has felt disgust at picking through the daily harvest of junk mail can fail to admire the effort to find an alternative. But success in any subscription strategy will, of course, in its own right, mean higher production runs, more consumption of scarce resources, and, accordingly, more waste-management problems. As the French sociologist Jacques Ellul liked to observe, when opposition to the expansion of technological activities surfaces, the opponents have little choice but to avail themselves of these same technologies to promote their cause.

Reading *Orion*, one encounters kindred issues in many forms. One of Ehrenfield's columns, for example, spins a cautionary tale of environmentalist efforts to restore Wrightston Island, "an unmapped, six-square-mile chunk of land in one of our great oceans about seven hundred miles from the nearest mainland." The flora and fauna prevailing there at the first human contact were unique to the setting.

On that first visit, Ehrenfield tells us, a pregnant goat escaped from the explorers' vessel. Centuries later, in 1985, an International Wildlife Fund (IWF) expedition found the island decimated by some 380 of the goat's descendants. "No tree seedlings or saplings were found; the youngest of the surviving *Arcania* trees was 327 years old." Ehrenfield continues:

> The IWF's conservation strategy recommended immediate extermination of the goats by sharpshooting . . . [But] the proposal to shoot the goats soon ran into fierce opposition . . . from a militant group of British animal rights activists known as the Mammal Liberation Front. The IWF office in Liverpool was bombed and the return expedition was cancelled.

Wrightston Island is fictitious, Ehrenfield finally allows. But the issues at stake are alive in many real-world settings. What vision of "nature" ought environmental action to uphold?

Enrenfield makes his own position clear:

> Many of our national seashores, parks and wildlife refuges are plagued by introduced horses, donkeys, pigs, and other "exotic" animals. "Plagued" is a judgment, but these feral animals are doing great damage . . . and it is a judgment that I knowingly make.

and he concludes,

> the National Park Service [has] an overriding obligation to protect the natural systems [it is] in charge of, and to keep them from being unduly altered by human actions, including the human tendency to drop alien pigs, horses, and donkeys around the landscape.

Ehrenfield's conclusion here strikes me as sober and convincing—though it will obviously not satisfy all environmentalists (or animal rights activists).

But note: whether one accepts his resolution or not, Ehrenfield's position points to deep dilemmas bound to confront any program of environmental action. Protecting "natural systems," or keeping such systems "free from being unduly altered by human actions," are notions of enor-

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mous subtlety. Any effort to act on such notions requires a model of what we should regard as a "natural system" and of what constitutes "undue alteration" of such systems.

The one thing that seems clear is that answers to such questions are not to be had from "nature" itself. We human beings are ourselves, in a sense, "feral animals," irretrievably escaped from the environmental niche occupied by our earliest ancestors. As a result, any attempt to restore a sustainable "steady state" in relations with our nonhuman environment requires self-conscious judgment of how such a state is to be conceived. And that requires, in turn, some concept of "the good society" that cannot simply be read out of any "design of nature."

To their credit, the editors and writers of *Orion* have avoided portraying these questions as any simpler than they are. □

Orion is available from 136 E. 64th St., New York, N.Y. 10021.

Edward Koren: At the 40th Anniversary Celebration

FOR 40 YEARS, DISSENT MAGAZINE HAS BEEN, ~ IN THE WORDS OF IRVING HOWE, ITS LATE, FOUNDING EDITOR, ~ SPEAKING FOR "THE SPIRIT OF DEMOCRATIC UTOPIANISM THAT RUNS LIKE A BRIGHT THREAD THROUGH AMERICAN INTELLECTUAL LIFE." STRANDS OF THAT THREAD ~ VETERANS AND NEWCOMERS ~ GATHERED AT THE PRINCETON CLUB TO CELEBRATE THE QUARTERLY'S ANNIVERSARY.
dissent
40TH ANNIVERSARY
SUSTAINING A LEFT MAGAZINE OF HIGH QUALITY, WRITTEN IN ORDINARY ENGLISH, CRITICAL, ALWAYS WORRIED AND SELF-CRITICAL... RESISTING EVERY MERELY FASHIONABLE DOCTRINE FOR 40 YEARS... THAT WAS IRVING'S ACHIEVEMENT. WE DIDN'T REALIZE HOW MUCH WORRYING HE DID FOR THE MAGAZINE!
THIS IS A HEROIC OUTFIT, BUT THERE'S NO MONEY IN IT ~ NOT ONLY DO THEY NOT PAY YOU ~ THEY ASK YOU FOR A CONTRIBUTION!

HAS ANYONE CAUGHT THE IRONY OF A MAGAZINE DEVOTED TO DISSENT HAVING ITS ANNIVERSARY AT THE PRINCETON CLUB?
IT'S AMAZING TO SEE HOW MANY PEOPLE HERE VIOLATE THE CLUB'S DRESS CODE!
I THOUGHT I'D BRING A CUSHION TO USE WHEN I FELL ON MY KNEES TO KISS THE FEET OF ALL THE PEOPLE HERE I ADMIRED
THIS HAS BEEN A WONDERFUL CELEBRATION...
BUT ONE PERSON IS NOT HERE....
KOREN

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Inequality and Immigration

In the Fall 1993 issue of Dissent *we printed an article by Richard Rothstein on immigration issues. Following are two responses to that piece and a reply by Rothstein. We welcome further reader correspondence.*—EDS.

H. Brand

In his article "Immigration Dilemmas," Richard Rothstein essentially argues (1) the impracticability of controlling immigration and (2) the economic advantages immigration confers upon American society. He also lists policies that, if adopted, would in time limit immigration. For the American left there are normative issues as well, which Rothstein ignores: should immigration, especially of poverty-stricken persons, be restricted at all; and if so, by what means?

Furthermore, granted the economic advantages of immigration, what price must immigrants pay to create them? Rothstein briefly notes the low wages for which immigrants often work but is not otherwise concerned with their working conditions. Yet the exploitation of immigrant labor lies at the center of the immigration problem. It is this exploitation, not the immigrants as such, that much of American labor has always perceived as a threat to its living standards. If Eugene Debs once cried that to restrict the immigration of "the exploited" was "utterly unsocialistic, reactionary, and in truth outrageous," he did so on the assumption that labor was strong enough to combat that threat. The assumption may be weak, but the idea he expressed retains its moral sting.

It is worth recalling two articles that appeared in the Summer 1980 *Dissent*, one by Otis Graham, "Illegal Immigration and the Left," the other by Michael Piore, "Another View of Migrant Workers." Graham favored a "responsible restrictionism." He aligned himself with the position of the old Socialist party, which, in 1910, advocated legislation preventing the immigration of strikebreakers, contract laborers, and the mass immigration of workers "brought about by the employing classes for the purpose of weakening the organization of American labor, and of lowering the standard of life of American workers." The party of course opposed exclusion on grounds of race or nationality and stood for free asylum for persons persecuted on religious or political grounds. Graham held the party's 1910 position to be still sound: "the left may well return to it." Graham favored restriction also on more fundamental grounds: he held that "social reconstruction at home could only be successfully pursued if the action was adequately protected from disruptive inflows of labor and capital . . . and other devices for postponing internal reorganization." He wrote, "The promise of equal opportunity cannot be kept without sealing off the labor market to the unchecked access of Third World manpower."

Piore advances a much more considered view of immigration; Rothstein's in essence parallels it. It is the dual structure of jobs that gives the impetus to immigration to the United States (and other industrial countries). Most immi-

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grant workers take menial, ill-paid jobs—jobs that offer neither security nor career opportunities. Native workers, including increasing numbers of African Americans, reject such jobs because they hold them to be degrading. The migrant worker has a different perspective: he or she considers his or her stay but temporary, and aims to accumulate the resources to buy land or establish a small business upon returning home. The desire may be thwarted, a return may not be feasible. But the rate of return of migrant workers remains quite high.

Piore would nevertheless "limit" immigration. He would do so by seeking to abolish the adverse characteristics of jobs to which migrant workers are relegated. Like Rothstein, Piore would do so principally by improving working conditions: raising the minimum wage, facilitating union organization, tightening health and safety standards, and so on. Citing New York City's success in turning garbage collection and street cleaning into sought-after occupations, he argues that the removal of adverse job characteristics would make hitherto secondary jobs attractive to native workers, and thus limit immigration.

But why would Piore "limit" immigration? He wants a tight labor market, with labor in short supply, such a labor market being "more conducive to social progress than a loose one." Large-scale immigration jeopardizes this goal.

At its core, American immigration policy is a cheap-labor policy. Reading Rothstein, one doesn't get a sense of the gravity of the problem. For example, he mentions sweatshops in garment manufacturing. Sweatshops are businesses that habitually violate wage-and-hour laws and safety and health laws. Nationwide statistics on sweatshops don't exist, but the General Accounting Office (GAO) studied sweatshops in New York City in 1988–1989 and called them "a local example of a nationwide problem." Citing N.Y. State Department of Labor officials, the GAO reported that of the 7,000 apparel firms in the city, 4,500 are sweatshops, employing more than 50,000 workers. Such employers, when inspected, are invariably cited for violating minimum-wage and overtime regulations.

They also fail to keep adequate payroll records, a failure for which there are no monetary penalties. It means not only that workers are underpaid but also that the employer does not pay Social Security tax. Rothstein mentions Zoë Baird in arguing that immigrant workers enable middle-class women to hold jobs outside the household. Baird didn't merely pay low wages; she deprived her employee of retirement benefits by not paying Social Security tax. Rothstein devotes several paragraphs to how immigrant workers will help pay, via payroll deductions, active workers' old-age pensions. But there are thousands of Zoë Bairds. In sum, vast numbers of immigrant (and for that matter native) secondary-jobholders cannot be sure of their entitlement to old-age pensions, let alone help to pay for those of retiring native workers.

Rothstein discusses the growth in the demand for fresh fruit and vegetables associated with "upscale life-styles," but the migrant farmworkers' "life-styles" form no part of his discussion. According to the "Report of the Commission on Agricultural Workers" (November 1992), annual earnings of farm worker families have frequently fallen well below federal poverty levels. A witness before the commission, a director of the Casa de Amigos center in Visalia, California, testified that the average farm worker was worse off today than ten years ago. "I know from experience in our social service ministries that over the past ten to twelve years we are aware of greater numbers of farmworkers in all levels of poverty," he said. Unemployment and chronic underemployment remain high. Employer commitment to providing housing, "especially for migrant families," has decreased. Increasing employer reliance on farm labor contractors "has resulted in deteriorating working and living conditions" for many migrant farm workers. Nor can farm workers readily exit from agriculture. "Mobility between immigrant and non-immigrant-dominated . . . occupations is . . . difficult. The strong commitment to farm work that [agricultural workers] . . . exhibit reflects the poor conditions in other

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immigrant-dominated occupations and a realistic appraisal of their ability to compete in the mainstream U.S. labor market." Hourly wage rates for nonfarm work are often lower than farm work wage rates; layoffs from nonfarm jobs are frequent. Thus, "upscale life-styles" are maintained at a price not made visible by Rothstein.

Piore would rely on rigorous enforcement of labor laws to improve working conditions and job characteristics, and thereby in time limit immigration. But the enforcement statistics presented in the GAO's report on New York City sweatshops are astounding: one example must suffice here. During the 1980s, only 6 percent of the estimated 17,000 apparel and restaurant establishments were inspected by the Wage-Hour Division; less than 1 percent were inspected by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration. Large proportions of the establishments were found in violation of labor and health and safety laws. Adequate funding of enforcement would surely be very costly; self-enforcement would be a partial alternative. But self-enforcement requires vigilant and powerful labor organizations.

The prospect for self-enforcement of decent working conditions seems remote. Dolores Huerta of the United Farm Workers, in a bitter statement appended to the "Report of the Commission on Agricultural Workers" (of which she is a member), asserts, "With their political influence, agribusiness has reversed hard-won reforms made through legislation by preventing adequate funding of enforcement or, as in the case of the Agricultural Labor Relations Board of California, influencing the appointments so they are employer dominated, thereby perverting and preventing the purpose of this law to encourage the organization of farm workers." To imply, as the report does, that the oversupply of migrant farmworkers contributes to their "horrendous working conditions" is to shift the blame away from agribusiness.

It is true that an oversupply of workers makes it easier for employers to cheapen labor. True, great and powerful unions were created during the 1930s in the midst of mass unemployment. But this development was dependent upon a highly favorable political and legislative climate. Fundamental change in the political climate is necessary before a revitalized labor movement can reemerge, making the improvements in labor standards that Piore urges feasible, and immigration control a minor concern.

Joanne Barkan

You are about to read the account of a wrestling match between Richard Rothstein's "Immigration Dilemmas" (*Dissent*, Fall 1993) and me. The struggle began when I came upon the following passage in Rothstein's essay:

> American upper-middle-class life is dependent on immigrant workers performing tasks at wages no established resident would consider. . . . Immigrant wages for housecleaning, lawn mowing, child care, and even carwashing make work outside the home feasible for people who could otherwise not afford it. Those who dream of cities without poorly educated, low-wage immigrants should be required to describe what middle-class and even lower-middle-class-life would be like without them. It can't be done, . . .

Maybe it can be done, I thought. Maybe the middle classes can survive and even prosper without low-wage immigrants—*not* by getting rid of the immigrants, but by narrowing the wage gap. Can't leftists think of a radical solution for the future that begins to construct greater equality now?

I decided to tackle Rothstein first on housecleaning. His position reminded me of a conversation I had in Stockholm in 1991 with Anna Hedborg, then deputy minister of social

Many thanks to David Belkin for letting me think aloud to him for hours. His comments were extremely helpful, but he's not responsible for what I've done with them.

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services in the Social Democratic government. According to Hedborg, middle-class Swedes—including professionals like herself in the highest income bracket—didn't hire housecleaners before the 1990 tax reform because the progressive tax system made it too expensive. The last *kronor* earned (in the highest bracket) were taxed at a rate of about 75 percent. As a result, the gap between upper and lower wage-earners narrowed, and deputy ministers ran their own vacuums.

Fortunately, tidying up in Sweden was less of a hassle than it is here. Swedes in 1991 could still depend on the following: fifteen months paid parental leave (to be used by either parent all at once or anytime over eight years), sixty days of sick-child leave per child each year with compensation, the regular workday shortened by two hours for parents with children under the age of eight, high quality public day-care centers for which parents paid about 15 percent of the fees (in 1991, 48 percent of all children under six attended public day care), government subsidized in-home services for elderly and disabled persons, and a minimum of five weeks paid vacation per year.

In short, the government redistributed Anna Hedborg's tax money in the form of public services and benefits that she and everyone else in society used. The redistribution was, of course, part of a larger system called the "Swedish model," designed to create greater equality and full employment. The system worked like this:

Some 85 percent of the work force belonged to unions. In centralized negotiations, labor and employers agreed upon a solidaristic wage policy, which meant equal pay for equal work nationwide. Inefficient firms either shaped up or went under, and productive firms had more surplus to invest, thereby boosting the efficiency (and growth) of the entire economy. Workers who lost their jobs could depend on finding new ones through the government's labor-market policies. High productivity combined with pay equity allowed wages to rise overall but helped the lower-paid workers most. The gap between average wages in the highest paying industry and the lowest paying industry shrank to only 12 percent by 1976 as against 30 percent in 1960 and much more before the war. Middle and working classes all prospered.

None of this could function without the government's imposing a restrictive fiscal policy to hold down demand in a full-employment economy. Without tight fiscal policy, prices would rise, and employers would bid up wages in an inflationary spiral (wage drift). The government used tax policy both to pay the welfare bill and to channel profits into investment.

For several decades, the model worked well—which isn't to say that it ran perfectly; there was, for example, some wage drift. But relative to what went on in other industrial nations, it looked terrific. Unemployment stayed low. Comparative studies throughout the 1980s showed that Sweden had one of the highest living standards in the world along with one of the highest levels of equality and democracy. One statistic says it all: when the overall health of children in the bottom 10 percent of income was compared to the health of children in the top 10 percent, no difference could be found.

To grapple with Rothstein's claim that middle-class life can't exist without *low-wage* immigrant labor, I'll add a few anecdotal words about how people in Sweden lived. In the late 1980s, it was taken for granted that most everyone, including workers, had either a small boat (you'd see them sailing up and down the waterways in Stockholm at the end of the work day) or a cabin in the country (those I visited were pleasant, but not lavish). On lovely waterfront property in the archipelago, the government set up mobile vacation homes for workers who didn't have their own. The hotels and restaurants had both workers and customers. I saw no run-down buildings. The cost of living was high for all Swedish residents, but people were comfortable, and everyone seemed to travel during vacations.

For the last thirty years, anyone who didn't want to hear good news about Sweden chanted, "Sweden is a homogeneous society, so everything there is different." This has become a myth. In the 1960s, a major wave of

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immigration brought workers from Yugoslavia, Turkey, Greece, and Finland. In the 1970s, the government stopped labor immigration (except from the common labor market with Nordic countries), but refugees began pouring into Sweden in ever larger numbers.

In 1989, when the economy was still booming, foreign residents counted for almost 10 percent of the population. Here are more recent figures: by the end of 1992, about 499,000 foreign nationals were living in Sweden. Another 431,000 immigrants had become naturalized citizens. Thus foreign-born residents counted for over 10 percent of the population of 8.7 million. (Rothstein mentions that foreign-born residents are 8.5 percent of the U.S. population; in Germany, the figure is 8.2 percent.) Only 16 percent of the foreign nationals living in Sweden come from other Nordic countries, and the proportion of non-Europeans is greater than that of Europeans.

So Sweden has had immigrants. But in a society where the wage gap has narrowed and where the government provides high-quality services and benefits to citizens and foreign residents, you can't really talk about *low-wage* immigrants as we do in the United States. As long as the Swedish model functioned, middle-class life didn't depend on a huge wage gap. Immigrants might have worked at the lower end of the narrow wage scale, but they could live decently. As opposed to feeding off them, the middle classes contributed to their support through progressive taxation and the solidaristic wage policy.

Back to housecleaning. In 1990, the Swedish Parliament passed a major tax reform. The minority Social Democratic government opted to compromise with the Liberal party, which had moved to the right on economic policy. The resulting law reshaped the tax system in a regressive direction, slashing marginal tax rates. According to Anna Hedborg in our 1991 conversation, many people (including some of her Social Democratic friends) began hiring housecleaners for the first time. Hedborg wasn't pleased.

"I'm sad that a value has been lost. Whenever I visited socialists in France or Brazil, they all had maids, and I used to be proud to say, 'We don't have that in Sweden.' I'm not critical of individuals. That would be stupid. What we had was important as a sign of equality in society. The wage differentials that make hiring maids possible shouldn't exist."

While I spoke to Hedborg, she was packing up her ministry office. The Social Democrats had done poorly in the recent elections, and the conservatives were taking over the government. Most American journalists reported that Swedes had tired of their cradle-to-grave welfare system and wanted something less boring to stimulate their atrophied entrepreneurial muscles. It wasn't true. Polls showed that the vast majority of Swedes wanted benefits and services to continue, but some swallowed the conservatives' line that if you cut taxes and privatized services, the economy would boom. Many Social Democratic voters punished their party for the regressive tax reform and other tactical errors.

The Swedish model showed signs of strain before the 1991 elections. Like most advanced economies, it came under the tremendous pressures of "globalization" during the 1980s. The guardians of the model couldn't figure out how to maintain an idiosyncratic national system in a world of hyper-mobile capital. No one could. It seems that a new version of the equality/full-employment model must be structured on a larger regional scale. The European Union looks like the new playing field to some Swedish Social Democrats.

Before I return to Rothstein's article, let me give a brief note on how immigrants in Sweden have fared recently. In 1991, Sweden slid into the serious recession that engulfed all of Western Europe. Average unemployment in 1992 for all Swedish citizens was 6 percent; for foreign nationals the figure was 13 percent. Foreign nationals are also more likely to have irregular working hours and to do shift work. The recession hit foreign workers harder because they work in the sectors most sensitive to swings in the economy (manufacturing, trade, hotels, and restaurants). In addition, the public sector is hiring fewer new workers. Despite all this, the difference in income

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between foreign nationals and Swedes is comparatively small. So far, Sweden still guarantees, not so much a safety net, as a stable base from which to build or rebuild a decent life.

Unfortunately there was a political backlash against immigrants, something Swedes hadn't experienced before. In 1991, the New Democracy party, with its anti-immigrant rhetoric, won 6.7 percent of the vote. But since then the party has plummeted (2.2 percent in an April 1994 poll). The Social Democrats, with their message of solidarity, have moved up quickly (48.7 percent in the same poll). Elections are scheduled for September 1994. The Social Democrats are expected to take back the government.

By the time I finished thinking through the place of immigrants in an equality/full-employment model, I'd also concluded that Rothstein's article is a hard-nosed and intelligent analysis of immigration in an extremely unequal society that lives off its weakest workers. Rothstein is correct—immigrants take the grubby jobs that no one else in the United States will touch; they keep marginal industries alive by accepting low wages and bad working conditions; they provide personal services on the cheap so the middle classes can work and play. Yet by arguing almost exclusively that our economy can't survive without exploiting immigrants, Rothstein stops short of what could, or should, be said.

To start, he *sounds* too little concerned with the circumstances of many immigrants' lives—poverty, hazardous work conditions, and back-breaking labor. He describes the economic niches they fill but not what it's like to be inside. He suggests some important reforms at the end of his article because, among other reasons, they would "encourage more honorable and responsible treatment of immigrants." But he justifies many of the changes in terms of how they would benefit or placate natives: enforce labor standards in industries where natives work so employers will have less reason to hire immigrants; include illegal immigrants in the national health plan so taxpayers won't have to finance their care ina public emergency rooms; step up union organizing and enforce the minimum wage so that immigrants will contribute more taxes to the broader community and consume fewer welfare benefits.

I don't want to dwell on this issue of "tone." Rothstein isn't writing an article to rally the masses against oppression. He seems to be addressing the middle classes, trying to persuade them that they need low-wage immigrants. Yet by analyzing immigration narrowly from this point of view, he ends up presenting substantial inequality as a necessity.

I assume Rothstein has in mind a constant flow of new immigrants into the system and then up the economic ladder. He might argue: swabbing out hotel toilets for minimum wage is no way to spend a life, but if you can do it for a year or a few years and move on to a better paying job or give your kids a boost up the ladder, then the system is unequal but not static. During times of economic expansion, immigrants often move up the ladder more quickly. Of course, this does nothing to close the income gap because the middle classes and the wealthy are moving up even faster.

In the context of the immigration debate, Rothstein has explained why we need immigrants (he's also argued convincingly that we can't—like it or not—keep them out). The left should pick up where Rothstein stops and push the argument for greater equality. For two reasons:

First, narrowing the wage gap and redistributing wealth looks like the only way to improve immigrants' lives significantly. We don't want to price them out of the market for the jobs they do; rather if we want a job done (say, broccoli picking) and if higher wages raise the price of broccoli, then high productivity in other areas of the economy must compensate. We need efficiency and growth overall so that we generate jobs and so that society can decide if and when it prefers to spend income on some labor-intensive production (classical opera, health care, broccoli picking). Put schematically, broccoli can cost more if other things cost less because of rising productivity.

The second reason leftists must argue for

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greater equality is because it's the basis for social justice and meaningful democracy. In this argument, immigrants are "simply" our lowest-paid workers, and all the standard reasons—moral and economic—for justice and equity apply. The United States has become so dislocated a society, so lopsided with inequality, that a major overhaul for productive investment and redistribution is required. Modern airports, safe streets, and well-maintained hospitals would serve us all.

The equality/full-employment model functioned well enough and long enough in Sweden to show that middle-class life can continue without poorly educated, low-wage workers (native or foreign born). But equality-plus-growth requires both redistributing some wealth away from the middle classes and favoring low-income workers. The left practically always fudges this issue by claiming that taxing the rich and squeezing profits will do the job. It won't. Significant equality requires broader redistribution.

Making the argument for equality only on moral grounds goes nowhere in the United States. Equality must include a real payoff for the middle classes. They need to believe that equality promotes economic growth and that poverty in society undermines their own economic progress.

Information can't hurt. Take, for example, the following two analyses:

First, orthodox economic thinking has long maintained that inequality is a necessary byproduct of economic growth in developing countries. On January 8, 1994, the *New York Times* reported a new departure. After studying the Asian "miracles," economists Nancy Birdsall and Richard Sabot concluded that, with the right policies, equality is not only a corollary of economic growth, it may even stimulate growth. More specifically, if resources are transferred to poor people, they use those resources to better themselves economically and to help their children. This benefits the entire economy, including the middle classes.

Birdsall and Sabot estimate that reducing the gap between the richest and poorest households by a third could add .7 percent to per-capita income growth year after year—a significant jump because the increase in most countries is less than 2 percent a year. It seems likely that transferring resources to poor people in a developed (but less dynamic) country would produce a similar, if smaller, effect.

Second, studies in the United States reveal an altered relationship between suburbs and cities. From the 1950s through the early 1970s, many suburbs showed rapid economic growth although their core cities declined. Now, suburban residents around healthy cities do better economically than those around sick cities; when a city declines, it pulls the suburbs down with it. So we need to share resources regionally. Suburbanites who tax themselves to help their center cities would be helping themselves.

Not an easy sell. But perhaps this kind of evidence adds up over time, shapes the public debate, changes some minds. The reform agenda begins with the policies suggested by Rothstein—labor-law reform, more union organizing, and enforcement of workplace rules and the minimum wage. Down a long road are progressive tax reforms and a labor movement strong enough to win (and radical enough to want) an investment-oriented wage policy that redistributes wealth.

Making an argument that goes beyond Richard Rothstein's is not just worth a try. It's the only way to reinsert the concept of social justice into the immigration debate. Why not link a tough-minded analysis of the present to serious thinking about equality and growth? Who knows—we might find a way for the middle classes to survive without poorly educated, low-wage immigrants to clean house.

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Richard Rothstein Replies

Neither H. Brand nor Joanne Barkan finds much to dispute in my analysis of the forces that drive immigration, the impossibility of fully consistent positions in response to calls for its restriction, or the desirability of progressive social policies to ameliorate immigrants' conditions and blunt the reaction of domestic workers with whom they compete.

Rather, Brand's and Barkan's complaint is not with my analysis but with my sentimentality—I "sound too little concerned with . . . what it's like to be inside" the immigrant experience (Barkan) and, although I "briefly note immigrants" low wages," I am "not otherwise concerned with their working conditions," and, reading my article "one doesn't get a sense of the gravity of the problem" (Brand).

I acknowledge the accuracy of these complaints, but my tone was deliberate. I attempted to convey that immigration reform will be unusually complex, requiring a balance of competing interests of immigrant and domestic workers, complementary interests of the same groups, and a multitude of economic, social, and political factors in sending and receiving countries that affect immigration flows in unpredictable ways. Many of these factors cannot be untangled in public policy and are not amenable to our influence. I hoped to suggest that expressions of outrage have only limited use in addressing this complex web of intersecting forces, because any balanced response to immigration must involve the compromise of competing values and loyalties.

Without restating my argument from the Fall issue, I have minor rejoinders to Brand's and Barkan's complaints. Brand wants to wish away immigration conflicts by noting that if a fundamental change in the political climate occurs, a revitalized labor movement could raise wages in immigrant enterprises, abolish exploitation of immigrant workers, and cleanse immigrant workplaces of sweatshop conditions. I don't know who benefits from insisting that social policy rests on so wildly unrealistic a premise, but in the best of circumstances, worker organization and labor standards enforcement can't be a clean single-factor solution—not least because of the international context in which immigration takes place, a context Brand ignores. The apparel industry, which employs fifty thousand immigrant workers in New York sweatshops, also employs hundreds of thousands of workers in even more degraded sweatshops in China, Bangladesh, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, the Philippines, and now even in Vietnam. Is our object to raise labor standards so high in New York that there is profit only to apparel assembly in far-off factories we can't see? Does Brand advocate shutting American markets to all exports from developing nations, a move that would be required to create space for radical improvements in working conditions of labor-intensive industries at home? Barkan says, "no problem"—we can have immigrants and good wages too, simply by using productivity gains in other industries to pay for uncompetitive wages in immigrant-impacted industries. Barkan is silent, however, about identifying the political constituency for this tax on native workers, unless she expects they won't notice a failure to share in the benefits of their own rising productivity. She also ignores the reality that, for the foreseeable future, the benefits from productivity gains in all industries, even high tech service industries like software design, will likely be lost to competition from low-wage nations.

In the long run, policy should seek more equitable development programs in the third world, a managed but not protectionist trade regime, and an expansive monetary and fiscal policy in the industrialized world to create markets for third world products, along with the organization of both American and third world workers and a coordinated upward harmonization of labor standards and enforcement. In the short run, to the extent that these policies do not proceed rapidly apace, industrialized nations will receive immigrants who

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accurately perceive that they will be exploited less here than at home. In making it possible for immigrant workers to settle here, we will place heavy downward pressure on wages and conditions of native workers (including immigrants of earlier flows and generations). Denouncing this situation won't change it, but recognizing it may make some amelioration possible.

Barkan's *deus ex machina* differs from Brand's. She counts not on a revived labor movement to wipe away immigration conflicts but on Swedish- (pre-1980, though) style social policies that reduce income inequality, provide high quality day care accessible to all, mandate paid time off from work at ten times the rate required here, and additional income redistribution in the event safety net holes remain. Like Brand, Barkan ignores the international technology and economic integration that make such a dream unrealizable in the foreseeable future. That's why, as Barkan acknowledges, her model no longer applies even in Sweden. There are now immigrants in Sweden performing low-wage work, their unemployment rate is higher than that of natives (while native Swedes have higher unemployment rates than we), there are increasing numbers of homeless living in the streets, and there is a growing backlash against immigrants. One can only conclude from Barkan's report that Sweden now moves more to the American model than we to theirs. I would add to Barkan's concession that Sweden recently raised its pension eligibility age from sixty-five to sixty-six. That's a sure sign the country has an aging workforce and inadequate fertility rate, a precursor to immigrant dependence.

Barkan finds solace in a *New York Times* report suggesting that more equitable income distribution in developing countries can stimulate economic growth. She's right, and in the very long run the adoption of such policies can mitigate pressures to emigrate. But in the nearer term, I offer another January *Times* account: that "a recession has done what laws and American border guards can't." A lack of jobs in California has resulted in a 6 percent decline in illegal immigrant border crossings from Mexico. Is this really the way we want to address the problem of undocumented immigrants? It will probably work—keeping the nation in permanent economic stagnation will reduce the incentive of Mexicans to emigrate. But can't we afford a different solution—tolerating the political friction, discomfort, conflict, and, yes, even exploitation of immigrants that will increase with a less modest economic recovery? □

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James B. Rule

WHO READS *DISSENT*?

"Nobody reads *Dissent* but a bunch of old lefties." So said one of our friends in the course of discussions about the magazine's future after Irving Howe's death last year. The remark was meant as a provocation, and so the editors took it.

But the irony wasn't lost; we realized that, in the nearly forty years of *Dissent*'s existence, no one had ever bothered to do a systematic study of our readership.

Last summer, we set out to redress this neglect. We polled a randomly selected seven hundred of our three to four thousand individual subscribers. The response was heartwarming, both in terms of the numbers who replied and of the wit and thoughtfulness of their comments. We now have returns to nearly 70 percent of our inquiries—a response rate that provides a statistically credible portrait of our subscribers.

We can report that our friend's seat-of-the-pants analysis was, at the very least, highly exaggerated. *Dissent* subscribers are not so old. Or rather, in age, as in many other characteristics, they show far more diversity than we had imagined. Roughly half are below fifty, and about 18 percent are below thirty-five. At the other end of that spectrum, some 9 percent are older than seventy-five.

Dissent subscribers are a well-educated lot. Nearly half hold doctorates or the equivalent, and another third have other advanced degrees. Yet, contrary to some of our expectations, only about one-third are university teachers; the rest are widely distributed across other occupations, with a concentration in the professions. Median family income is about $65,000, with 12 percent of respondents reporting family incomes of less than $25,000 and another 12 percent incomes above $125,000.

One question on the survey asked for religious identification: "Do you consider yourself as part of any of the following groups . . .?" encouraging respondents to check as many as they liked of a list of groups including "Protestant," "Catholic," and "Jewish." Thirty-two percent described themselves as Jewish, 12 percent as Protestant, and 7 percent as Catholic. Forty-nine percent declined any religious identification.

What do subscribers like to read about in *Dissent*? U.S. politics was the category most often chosen from the list we provided—by some 91 percent of respondents. Other frequently chosen categories were articles on U.S. culture (76 percent), Western Europe (54 percent), Eastern Europe (51 percent), and union affairs (45 percent). (These figures come to more than 100 percent because people were invited to choose as many topics as they liked.) There was a slight tendency for older readers to express more interest in Western Europe and the Middle East.

When they're not reading *Dissent*, our subscribers report reading the *Nation* (50 percent), the *New York Review* (48 percent), the *New Yorker* (41 percent), and the *New Republic* (32 percent), among many other journals. Older readers seemed to gravitate a bit more to the *New York Review* and the *New Yorker*, and the younger to the *Nation*.

In one striking note of nondiversity, we were astounded to find that virtually four out of five respondents were men. To a degree, this finding may reflect a tendency among couples to take out subscriptions in the man's name, rather than the woman's. More preponderately, we sense that it attests to a genuine skew in the readership—and, accordingly, an untapped source of new subscribers! We hope that our

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new coverage of feminist issues will bring the magazine to the attention of this under-reached constituency.

Surveys, as we all know, are Procrustean beds for ideas. Thoughts that don't fit the categories presented risk being lopped off or pushed out of any recognizable shape. We could not completely exorcise such effects from the results noted above. But fortunately, many respondents availed themselves freely of our invitation to characterize their reactions to *Dissent* in their own words. The results were witty and varied. In response to an open-ended survey question asking respondents to cite anything they *didn't* like about *Dissent*, for example, one reader wrote, "A certain stodginess and a touch of hostility to multiculturalism." To a question asking what changes the magazine should *avoid*, one respondent wrote, "Please avoid the cute and the trendy. Leave that to the *New Republic* and *Mother Jones*." To a question that asked people what they find *attractive* in *Dissent* that they missed in other periodicals, many pinpointed in-depth, analytical writing—though many of these same readers, like the one quoted above, allowed that there could be too much of this sort of good thing. "Don't give up the struggle," one reader wrote, a sentiment echoed in different terms by countless respondents.

To all subscribers who participated in this survey, our sincere thanks. We next turn to the more complicated task of surveying the larger number of readers who buy their copies of *Dissent* from newsstands and bookstores. □

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Christopher Hitchens

CRITIC OF THE BOOBOISIE

MENCKEN: A BIOGRAPHY, by Fred Hobson. Random House, 1994. 672 pp. $35.00.

In my spare time, I collect significant encounters that never took place. Karl Marx and Charles Darwin were intended by a mutual friend to meet but the rendezvous did not occur. George Orwell waited for Albert Camus to keep an appointment in a café in St. Germain but gave up and slouched away. Almost as soon as he was exiled to Switzerland, Alexander Solzhenitsyn made a date to have lunch with Vladimir Nabokov, but apparently lost his nerve and failed the feast. On the day of the terrible stroke that pulled down his mental shutters for good, H.L. Mencken was due to break bread with Evelyn Waugh.

It would have been good to have (even from Alistair Cooke, who had proposed the introduction) an account of this aborted conversation between two Tories, two snobs, two racists, two masters of prose and humor and invective, two literary products of the vulgar industry of journalism. One was a self-caricaturing English type with a disdain for America and the other a snarling Anglophobe who believed that American English was a distinct language; one was a preposterously dogmatic Roman Catholic and the other a man who described himself as "a materialist's materialist." Both men had a surreptitious fancy for Fascism, but Fascists are by definition hard to internationalize, and it might be that their antagonisms would have outweighed their sympathies. Between those who are hardily cynical about human nature and those who profess a belief in original sin, there is no necessary agreement.

Mencken, though, survives as much more of a conundrum for enlightened and "progressive" Americans than does Waugh for their English counterparts. While Waugh was a self-proclaimed and classic reactionary, once famously excoriating the Conservative party for failing to turn back the clock by as much as a minute, Mencken comes down to us as an advocate of literary and scientific modernism. He was the first American editor to publish James Joyce. He admired Joseph Conrad almost as much as he did Mark Twain, and won Conrad's respectful acknowledgment as a critic. He did much to convince American readers to throw off nativism and "uplift" in their choice of fiction. In one of the great confrontations between Reason and Reaction—the Scopes trial in Tennessee—Mencken was the impresario to Clarence Darrow and became, for all succeeding generations, the official historian and quote-meister of the episode. Yet he was a bigot. Indeed, not so much a bigot as an actual "scientific" or quasi-anthropological racist. And he was not so much an opponent of the New Deal, or of reformist and optimistic enterprises and utopias, as he was a foe to democracy itself.

But, as has been shown by writers as diverse as Murray Kempton and Gore Vidal, it is sometimes necessary for a radical critic to be contemptuous of "public opinion." Cynicism, which is most often the affectation of conservatives, can also be part of the armor of those who are prepared to go through life as a minority of one. Populism, which is in the last instance always an illiberal style, may come tricked out as folkish emancipation. That is when it most needs to be satirized. In his

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wonderful novel *The Child In Time*, Ian McEwan describes the experience of watching daytime television audiences as "the democrat's pornography." I thought of Mencken when I read that. He had very many grievous moral and intellectual shortcomings and even deformities. But the itch to be at one with the wisdom of the majority was not one of them. *Vox populi, vox dei*—a treacherous saying that has often been used to cement alliances between the plutocracy and the mob. It helps, of course, in resisting the *populi* bit, if you are convinced that the *dei* part is nonsense also. Thus we have Mencken, in his heroic period, defending Eugene Debs and Robert LaFollette not because they were tribunes of the plebs but because they were individuals of integrity who stood out against the yelling crowd as well as against the oligarchy. If only all of his ironies had been so pleasing.

The best attack on Mencken has been written in our own time by Garry Wills, who so to speak re-opened the Scopes trial in his *Under God*. Far from being "the idol of all Morondom," in Mencken's lapidary phrase, William Jennings Bryan was a serious exponent of the "social gospel." He actually had a sincere concern with the political implications of Darwinism: "this doctrine of the strongest." Having spent an admittedly rather bellowing career as a defender of the downtrodden, an advocate of female suffrage, and an opponent of capital punishment, he feared that "Social Darwinism"—a term not actually coined until later in the century—would resurrect ancient cruelties and unfairnesses and guise them as scientific findings or necessities. One can overstate Bryan's decency and compassion (even Wills concedes that he was feeble about segregation because "few populists could afford to oppose their poor white constituents") but there is no question that Mencken *did* take the viewpoint of "natural selection" precisely because it validated his own views of Nietzsche and the pitiless battle for mastery:

> There must be a complete surrender to the law of natural selection—that invariable natural law which ordains that the fit shall survive and the unfit shall perish. All growth must occur at the top. The strong must grow stronger, and that they may do so, they must waste no strength in the vain task of trying to lift up the weak.

Mencken wrote this in his first serious book, a study of Nietzsche published in 1908. It is thus possible to derive all of his finest and most memorable polemics—against the First World War, against Christian fundamentalism, against the Anglophile WASP aristocracy, and against the backwardness and misery of the Dixie states—from an essentially vile and infirm premise that he adopted from the outset. He opposed the First World War because he thought Wilhelmine Germany to be the embodiment of Nietzschean strength and virtue. He opposed the Christian fundamentalists because they made it easier for him to attack religion itself—the source of all sickly and irrelevant feelings of charity. Dislike for the Anglophiles and WASPs was a natural corollary for a man who believed in Teutonism, while contempt for the states of the old Confederacy was a merely pleasurable corollary of that, because it offered up the Anglo-Saxon white trash at their trashiest and their Christianity in its most maudlin and twisted form. No wonder, then, that in his ill-tempered and misanthropic shape, he has been adopted as a premature foe of "PC" by the rancorous crowd of minor swells who put out the *American Spectator*, and who imagine themselves quite bold as they gulp down subsidies from Olin, Scaife, and the think tanks of post-Darwinist plutocracy.

But any reductionist analysis of Mencken runs the risk of ignoring a fine mind that engaged itself in some high duties. Whatever the foulness of some of his private and public thoughts (and the newly released Baltimore papers, in which he freely employs such low terms as "nigger" and "kike," add nothing essential to our existing stock of understanding), Mencken is fascinating because he often transcended what he freely called his "prejudices." Take the following extract from his *Holy Writ*, where he argues that the English translation of the Bible is imperishable:

> To this day it has enchanted the English-speaking peoples so effectively that, in the main, they

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> remain Christians, at least sentimentally. Paine has assaulted them, Darwin and Huxley have assaulted them, and a multitude of other merchants of fact have assaulted them, but they still remember the Twenty-Third Psalm when the doctor begins to shake his head, they are still moved beyond compare (though not, alas, to acts!) by the Sermon on the Mount, and they still turn once a year from their sordid and degrading labors to immerse themselves unashamed in the story of the manger. It is not much, but it is something. I do not admire the general run of American Bible-searchers—Methodists, United Brethren, Baptists and such vermin. But try to imagine what the average low-browed Methodist would be if he were not a Methodist but an atheist!

I submit that, despite a few infelicities like "main" and "remain," this is very finely written. It shows something of the feeling for the religious pulse that Marx evinced in his critique of Hegel, and it does so without making any concessions to illusion. It also, and curiously, echoes a favorite observation of Evelyn Waugh, who used to ask his outraged friends to imagine how much nastier he would be if he were not a Catholic.

In his polemics against Woodrow Wilson and the First World War (clearly the root of his animus against Bryan, who had been bamboozled into serving as Wilson's secretary of state) Mencken may have been actuated by Nietzchean contempt for that "anaemic offspring of the slave-morality of the post-Exodus Jews" as against "the sturdy reassertion of the master morality of the Periclean Greeks . . . Germany is strong, and fearless, and ruthless, and resolute. *Ergo*, Germany must, shall and will prevail." But this bombast (ill-written, aside from any other consideration) was to give way to clearer and sweeter notes. Mencken took his antiwar positions seriously, and ended up making common cause with despised underdogs: bullied German waiters and socialist agitators, to say nothing of contemptible bleeding-heart outfits like the infant American Civil Liberties Union. Some of his best prose dates from this period, when, as we like to forget, the American academy and the preponderance of the intelligentsia were consumed by the dingiest chauvinism and conformity, and when the Constitution was simply heaved overboard. The caustic review that he wrote concerning the power-worshiping jurisprudence of that old coward and fraud Oliver Wendell Holmes is, among other things, a masterpiece of forensic legal analysis and would not disgrace the most meticulous civil libertarian.

In the decades between the wars, Mencken kept up his loathing of populist intolerance and small-time tyranny, and was always ready to empty the vials of his wrathful contempt over the KKK, over the provincial censors, and over all varieties of the Babbitt and the Rotarian. The special signifier of his independence was an unslackening scorn of the religious; then as now America's most salient taboo. He knew that we do not "have" bodies but that we *are* bodies, and that the realm of illusion begins at the door of the Sabbath school, and if he over-used certain metaphors ("Chautauqua," "Bible searcher") it was partly because he would return to the fray again and again:

> The *boobus Americanus* is a bird that knows no closed season—and if he won't come down to Texas oil stock, or one-night cancer cures, or building lots in Swampshurst, he will always come down to Inspiration and Optimism, whether political, theological, pedagogical, literary or economic.

The unpleasant realization that this is true (I read it last on the day that President Clinton beat his chest at the National Prayer Breakfast) is an aspect of that "democrat's pornography" that I cited earlier; the indecent thrill that you can get when you see the credulous filling the hat at rallies commanded by Oliver North and Pat Robertson and Louis Farrakhan.

With Mencken, the lucid interval is the thing to look for. He could write for page upon page about how the "feminine" principle was one of feebleness and unreason, based on weakness and deceit. And he would regularly refuse to meet any man whom he suspected of being homosexual. Yet he wrote beautifully and with insight about the trials of American womanhood at the hands of the brutish male (said male's efforts in *amour* memorably likened to a gorilla's essays upon the violin). And he composed an extremely well-wrought essay in

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defense of Oscar Wilde, perhaps in part because he recognized another victim of the jeering, taunting mob. Bertrand Russell, an elitist radical of a very much different provenance, once said that his life changed when his grandmother taught him the Biblical injunction: "Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil." This very much materializes Mencken's point about the scriptures as a chiefly literary influence. If it had been said by a respectable German philosopher he could have adopted it entire as his own motto.

Fred Hobson's biography allows one to take a longer look at Mencken, and to savor his more obvious contradictions. He seems to have been "imprinted" early on, by a family of slightly oppressive respectability, which, while warm and nurturing in its way, also sought to indenture the young Henry to the equivalent of a Dickens blacking factory. Steeped as a youth in the English declension of literature, he was avid for Kipling as soon as he could discriminate. Interested in bloodlines—perhaps too much interested—this later foe of Anglo-Saxondom was pleased to find that his roots were in Saxony. He was even more delighted to discover a noble ancestor, Johann Burkhard Mencke (*sic*), who had in 1715 authored a satirical compendium entitled *De Charletaneria Eruditorum* (On the Charlatanry of the Learned), which one would pay a good price to see updated for this year's market. "The tracking down of quacks of all sorts," as Mencken was to put it, had become so much his own *raison d'être* that the discovery of the book had an almost superstitious effect upon him: "All my stock in trade was there—loud assertions, heavy buffooneries, slashing attacks on the professors. It really was uncanny."

Hobson also shows another attractive side to Mencken, which was his unstinting attitude to work. He could not bear to be unproductive, and looked with disdain upon those who did not labor, or those who wasted their talent (Scott Fitzgerald conspicuous here) or those who were slothful. He was interested in what people made, and how much they made for it, and did not despise the meat-and-potatoes aspect of existence. ("Henry James," he wrote in *The Smart Set*, "would have been vastly improved as a novelist by a few whiffs from the Chicago stockyards.") He was, in general, a friend to the working stiff, and this sympathy, again, allowed him to take holidays from his other obsessions. As he once wrote to Theodore Dreiser, with whom he had a lifelong if rather fraught comradeship:

> It seems plain to me that the most valuable baggage that you carry is your capacity for seeing the world from a proletarian standpoint. It is responsible for all your talent for evoking feeling. Imagine *Sister Carrie* written by a man without that capacity, say Nietzsche. It would have been a mess.

That anyone should be preferred to Nietzsche is, as we have seen, quite a concession for Mencken to have made. Nor was this a singular instance conditioned by friendship. Mencken also became an adoptive editorial parent to James T. Farrell, whose *Studs Lonigan* trilogy possessed the same proletarian integrity and whose Trotskyism Mencken affected not to mind about.

No sooner has one observed this than one looks for its contradiction or negation, and finds it without overmuch difficulty. Later in life, Mencken became the representative of the Baltimore *Sun* group in its labor negotiations, and proved a tough nut as a boss's man. Indeed, Hobson suggests that encounters with Jewish union leaders helped to fuel his animus. He became fond of adding the prefix "Jewish" to the words "radical" or "Communist," just like any Roosevelt-baiting Rotarian. This is especially melancholy when one recalls that in 1917, in the course of his great philippic against the wretchedness of Georgia in *The Sahara of the Bozart*, Mencken had ridiculed the morality of segregation and concluded:

> But if you marvel at the absurdity, keep it dark! A casual word, and the united press of the South will be upon your trail, denouncing you bitterly as a scoundrelly damnyankee, a Bolshevik Jew.

Everybody has now heard of the *tranche* of Mencken papers released to researchers in 1989. The disclosures—reliably misogynistic

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in tone, as well as surreptitiously nasty about former friends and openly mean about blacks and Jews—have ignited one of "those" rows, not dissimilar to the convulsion over Philip Larkin's letters in England. The great disadvantage of such disputes is that they are (a) posthumous and (b) require no intellectual equipment of the participants. Without a personal knowledge of Mencken, I should not care to say for sure whether he was a bigot or just bigoted. We can at least identify a contradiction between the defender of Richard Wright and lifelong friend of Alfred Knopf, and the man who gave way to racist vulgarity in private. He was scrupulous and mannerly in his dealings with individual Jews and African Americans, while apparently harboring crass suspicions of them in the mass, so to speak. Among some hypocrites of today, the paradox is more commonly met with the other way about. I know this is progress.

In the final reckoning, however, Mencken's politico-philosophical ambivalences do not cancel one another out. What I have said about his brilliance and verve can only be said of the period between about 1910 and the end of Prohibition—the years when he could be *contra mundum*, and the heroic decades of American hysteria and prudery. One may re-read much of this output today, skipping over or even forgiving the rough bits out of sheer relish. The false note is usually the heavily affected Germanophilia. And this is not the Germany of Goethe, Heine, or Marx; it is unashamedly *Junker*ish, beery, and chauvinistic, laced with the sort of sentimentality that Mencken generally despised. (It never seems to strike him, when he writes about warfare and the manly German virtues in 1914, that his first literary hero, Rudyard Kipling, was doing precisely the same thing on "the other side.")

By the mid-1930s, this strain in Mencken had ceased to be a mere quirk and was becoming a problem. In 1922, reporting from Munich, he wrote with alarming prescience about German resentment of Versailles and said that "Every intelligent man looks for a catastrophe. If it comes, there will be a colossal massacre of Jews." Is there, or is there not, a hint of vicarious satisfaction in that phrasing? We know at any rate that in 1933, reviewing *Mein Kampf* for the *American Mercury*, he was so even-handed as to draw a pained howl from Knopf himself. About the rise of Fascism in general, Mencken was sanguine; more sanguine, let us say, than he was about FDR. That might be condemnation enough. Yet it is not. Think of the incredible *literary* failure that is involved in Mencken's refusal to write a serious polemic against Hitler. Here, aside from the grotesque embodiment of all hatred and superstition, was the quack, charlatan, and crank to end all quacks, charlatans, and cranks. Such a target! And, from the pen that had flayed and punctured the "booboisie," there came little or nothing. Hobson tries his best to be fair, quoting Mencken on Hitler's "obscene monkeyshines" and a number of other disobliging asides, but the overall effect is of somebody going on record, covering a flank, cutting short an argument. On the great confrontation of his time, the sage of Baltimore funked it. His wartime stuff is not really worth re-reading, and he became more and more interested in family folklore and the amassing of large clippings—files and anthologies concerning his own person and papers. In 1948, the last four-party election in American history, he managed some fairly spirited abuse of the Henry Wallace ticket but ended up casting his own ballot for Strom Thurmond—whose "American Party" condensed all the Southern crackerdom, religiosity, and bellicose patriotism that he had spent a lifetime defaming. And that, more or less, was that.

The great thing about biographies, and about great troves of personal papers, is that they remind us how few years, in a real human life, are well spent. Napoleon Bonaparte, according to George Orwell, once remarked that, had he been hit by musketry on entering Moscow, he would have gone down to history as its greatest general. We could have been well spared the decline of many other authors and statesmen who only rose briefly above their frailties. As it turns out, Mencken's own obsequy for Ambrose Bierce will do duty here:

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> I have a suspicion, indeed, that Bierce did a serious disservice to himself when he put those twelve volumes together. Already an old man at the time, he permitted his nostalgia for his lost youth to get the better of his critical faculty . . . the result was a depressing assemblage of worn-out and fly-blown stuff, much of it quite unreadable. His good work is lost in a morass of bad and indifferent work . . . filled with epigrams against frauds long dead and forgotten, and echoes of old and puerile newspaper controversies.

With Mencken, the face grew to fit the mask, and the playful *Prejudices* became the drone of authentic prejudice. Those who flirt with race theory should learn to beware their own dominant gene. □

William Kornblum

ENDURING OBSTACLE

AMERICAN APARTHEID: SEGREGATION AND THE MAKING OF THE UNDERCLASS, by Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton. Harvard University Press, 1993. 304 pp. $29.95.

"Integration: the interval in a neighborhood between the moment the first black family moves in and the last white family moves out." This bit of folk sociology made the rounds in Chicago during the bloody open occupancy and fair housing marches of the 1960s. After the violence ended it seemed for a while that hard-won legislation could help ensure a future of racial integration in communities throughout America. Douglas Massey and Nancy Denton's masterful study of residential segregation in the United States will help explain why these hopes are still frustrated.

Some readers may be put off by the bold assertion, explicit in the book's title, that race relations in the United States bear comparison to South African apartheid. But the authors wish to shock us into recognizing that racial segregation in neighborhoods and communities continues to give the lie to our ideals of integration in any sphere of our society. Sociologists with long credentials in the quantitative study of population, the authors provide stark evidence for what they term the "hypersegregation" of American blacks in most urban centers and suburbs. Segregation in our living places, they argue, is the root cause of our failure to achieve racial justice and equality of opportunity over the forty years since *Brown v. Board of Education*. "It seems to us amazing," they write, "that people were even debating whether race was declining in importance when levels of residential segregation were so high and so structured along racial lines. . . ."

Massey and Denton show that in the sixteen most highly segregated metropolitan areas of the nation, segregation is so intense that black residents are unlikely to see a white person in their immediate residential neighborhood or in adjacent neighborhoods. The major urban ghettos are home to more than one-third of the nation's African Americans.

Children growing up in the ghettos of Cleveland, Detroit, Chicago, Newark, New York, Dallas, Los Angeles, and the others have, the authors tell us, "little direct experience with the culture, norms, and behavior of the rest of American society and few social contacts with members of other racial groups. Ironically, within a large, diverse, and highly mobile postindustrial society, such as the United States, blacks living in the heart of the ghetto are among the most isolated people on earth."

In a short review of the history of U.S. racial segregation, Massey and Denton largely reject theories about the "natural" or voluntary dimensions of racial segregation in residential neighborhoods. They note that in the nineteenth century it was common for blacks and whites to live on the same blocks: "Before 1900, blacks were not particularly segregated from whites, and although they were over-represented in the poorest housing and the meanest streets, their residential status did not differ markedly from that of others in the same economic circumstances." Black poverty in this earlier period of U.S. urban history, the authors argue, was more a result of discrimination in employment than in housing. African Americans could be found in most neighborhoods of northern cities. On the other hand, because the black population was relatively small

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in northern cities before the turn of the century, it was also true that most blacks lived in residential neighborhoods that were at least 90 percent white, and blacks were more likely to encounter whites in their residential life than other blacks.

Massive industrialization and urbanization rapidly changed the situation. As the Great Migration gained momentum in the period around World War I and thereafter, over half a million rural blacks moved northward each decade, as opposed to the far smaller stream of 70,000 per decade or less during the late nineteenth century. In the 1920s over 800,000 rural African Americans crowded into industrial cities of the North and a parallel mass migration was taking place in Southern industrial cities like Birmingham.

African Americans in the cities encountered hostilities far more deeply ingrained and more violent than experienced by any other urban migrant people in the period. It is a myth that all urban newcomers experienced roughly equal degrees of segregation and hostility. Blacks encountered far worse hostility, far higher levels of residential and occupational segregation, and incomparably more violence than Jews, Italians, Irish, or any other white ethnic group. Deplorable as the conditions for white immigrant groups were at the time, passage from neighborhoods of first settlement into the larger society was far easier for them than for African Americans.

Nor has the situation changed appreciably. African Americans may move out of the poorest ghetto neighborhoods as they achieve educational and economic mobility, but the authors show that rates of segregation are not essentially different for blacks in the poorest and highest income categories. Most blacks in this land of the free and home of the market cannot even buy their way out of the ghetto. It follows them into the suburbs.

There is a good deal of rich material here about the influence of institutional racism on persistent segregation. Massey and Denton include a valuable review of the way housing policies since World War II have contributed to the persistence of racial segregation. The suburban bias in mortgage and tax policies, tolerance of bank "redlining," construction of massive and understaffed housing projects in already segregated ghettos, and failure to enforce fair housing legislation are only a few of the forms of institutionally sanctioned racism.

Less familiar, perhaps, are the trends in how whites and blacks feel about living together and the influence of white prejudice and fears on residential segregation. Polls show that blacks do not necessarily wish to live in white neighborhoods, but they desire the same freedom of choice about where to live that other Americans (and many new immigrants) enjoy. In fact, the polls indicate that blacks tend to desire to live in neighborhoods where there is a rough parity between themselves and members of other races. They consistently show a reluctance—based no doubt on collective memory of cruel experience and the present reality of increasing "hate crimes"—to be pioneers, to move themselves and their children into all-white neighborhoods.

White voices, the authors note, "are more committed to open housing and residential integration in principle than in practice. Although 88 percent of whites . . . agreed that blacks have a right to live wherever they want to, only 40 percent . . . were willing to vote for a community-wide law stating that 'a homeowner cannot refuse to sell to someone because of their race or skin color.' " Less than a third of whites, as opposed to over two-thirds of blacks, are willing to live in a community which is roughly split fifty-fifty white and black.

Racial attitudes measured by surveys are far milder than what one hears in private conversation among many whites. And clearly the political leaders of white communities continue to hear the less guarded fears and racial prejudices of their white constituents. Otherwise, why would they continue to look away from the obvious persistence of discrimination in housing markets? The Fair Housing Act of 1968 remains, it would seem to most white lawmakers' satisfaction, largely ineffective in bringing about major improvements in housing segregation.

The authors remind us that the "problem with the Fair Housing Act lay not in the coverage or in the kinds of discrimination that it specifically banned but in its enforcement provisions." As a result of compromises with conservatives (led at

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the time by Illinois Senator Everett Dirksen) the federal Housing and Urban Everett Development Department has little power to punish real estate agents who steer black home buyers and renters away from housing where only whites live. The burden of proof of discrimination rests with the buyer, who must show that whites are chosen in preference over them. The law also places a further burden on the victims of discrimination by making plaintiffs liable for court costs and attorneys' fees.

Massey and Denton advocate enforcement of a toughened Fair Housing Act and far greater investment in federal monitoring and auditing of discrimination in local housing markets. Audit surveys send in black couples to real estate offices, followed by white couples with the same housing needs. Over and over again such studies show that blacks are steered away from all-white neighborhoods and told that advertised houses or apartments have already been rented. When the white couple in the audit appears they are often shown the places that the blacks were told were unavailable. It takes many such audit surveys to target specific areas where discrimination exists, and it will take higher fines and stiffer penalties than the existing law provides to ever make fair housing a reality.

Nathan Glazer, in a *New Republic* review of this book, noted that Massey and Denton want government to do more to enforce anti-housing-discrimination laws. But Glazer cautions that "a successful program for massive dispersal would require government action on a scale that is simply not possible in a democracy." But the authors never call for "massive dispersal." They advocate stricter enforcement of present laws so that agents who steer blacks away from homes they might like to buy and banks that refuse mortgages to qualified blacks, would be more heavily punished. Can it be that such measures to ensure a fair housing market would threaten our democracy? Massey and Denton make it clear that it is the persistent failure of legislators (and of respected intellectuals as well, I would add) to confront the causes and consequences of our separation as a people that threatens our democratic institutions and endangers the civility of American life.

Unless there is more progress toward residential integration, the authors do not hold high hopes for significant improvement in the economic future of people trapped in the ghettos of deindustrialized cities like Chicago, Detroit, and Cleveland. Residential segregation blocks the open search for jobs and better education. And, so obvious we often forget it, unpopular policies like school busing to achieve racial integration are but feeble efforts to circumvent the divisive consequences of residential segregation. These observations lead the authors to say that "racial segregation—and its characteristic institutional form, the black ghetto—are the key structural factors responsible for the perpetuation of black poverty in the United States."

They also use their findings with regard to persistent racial segregation to make statements about the rise of the ghetto "underclass." The leap from an analysis of segregation and poverty to an assertion that poor ghetto residents form an underclass, or reside in areas that are legitimately labeled as underclass communities, is problematic. The knot of conceptual and ideological problems posed by the term underclass remains tangled after even the best discussion of segregation. And although this book should be regarded as an essential source and policy guide on racial segregation in the United States, its emphasis on the contribution of racial segregation to the formation of an urban underclass is its least successful feature.

There are now more up-to-date figures available on urban racial segregation based on 1990 census analysis. Recent research by Reynolds Farley and William H. Frey at the University of Michigan, for example, shows that segregation persists but may have peaked in the 1970s and early 1980s—the period most frequently referred to by Massey and Denton. The probability that the races live in segregated neighborhoods remains extremely high for the major deindustrialized urban centers but is far lower in younger, rapidly growing cities of the West and Southwest. It is also true, however,

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that many of these cities do not have substantial numbers of African Americans. And in many of them it was the influence of the military, the most desegregated institution in American life, that established the patterns of residential integration that show up in the demographic research. In sum, nothing in the more current data fundamentally contradicts the basic findings or policy recommendations of *American Apartheid*.

Whenever I've discussed this tough-minded and well-documented book with African-American scholars or activists I have heard roughly the same response: that segregation persists, encouraged by public policy, is not news but needs to be said over and again. The idea that we should link arms to strengthen the Fair Housing Act is viewed, I think, more as a tepid white response than a call that can motivate a new round of black activism. The action for African Americans at this moment in their endless travail is in the ghettos. The need to rescue a generation of young people growing up in danger, whose families have slim chances to escape the inner city, outweighs for now any reveries of an integrated future. These responses in no way diminish the importance of this book. They suggest, however, that if white Americans are upset by the charge that they are living in an apartheid society, they would best take up the anti-segregationist banner and wave it where the problems of racism reside. □

Mark Levinson

NUMBERS GAME

THE MISUNDERSTOOD ECONOMY: WHAT COUNTS AND HOW TO COUNT IT, by Robert Eisner. Harvard Business School Press, 1994. 222 pp. $22.95.

Bill Clinton campaigned for his current job by reminding America what had happened during twelve years of Republican rule. He pointed out that wealth was transferred from the poor to the wealthy; he described an economy sapped of strength by speculation and fraud; he lamented the fact that so many people were out of work; he decried the condition of our public sector.

Clinton offered an alternative. His "putting people first" strategy proposed government-led programs of public and private investment. Clinton favored a strong economic stimulus, funding for education and training, and direct public investment in infrastructure and new technologies such as fast trains, telecommunications, and environmental innovations. These measures were designed to ease the transition from a military economy and to raise productivity and create jobs.

To assist in selling his program to a skeptical Congress and financial community, Clinton appointed Robert Rubin from Goldman Sachs to head the National Economic Commission and chose conservative Senator Lloyd Bentsen as secretary of the treasury and deficit hawk Leon Panetta as budget director.

But the advisers, backed by respectable opinion, were themselves skeptical of Clinton's program. They believed the deficit had to be reduced, and they took seriously the opinions of bondholders and investors, according to whom inflation is the greatest evil and who are perfectly content with stagnant wages and slow growth because the market value of bonds rises under those conditions.

Having appointed these advisers, Clinton took their advice. Clinton based his economic plan on deficit reduction. He declared that the result would be lower interest rates, increased investment, and more jobs. But in the midst of an unusually slow economic recovery the Federal Reserve raised interest rates despite the lack of inflation. Then the administration announced that it was downplaying economic growth in favor of higher interest rates and stable financial markets. One wonders what George Bush would have done differently.

Clinton's transformation is emblematic of the narrowing of economic policy choices in American politics. The fact that most economists have similar opinions on the budget deficit, unemployment, and trade policy, and that these opinions coincide with the interests of the affluent, surely contributes to the somnolence of our policy debate.

Robert Eisner is an exception to this

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consensus. He is a maverick who believes that when nine million people are out of work and the economy is burdened with unused capacity and inflation at low levels, government has a responsibility to increase growth and reduce unemployment. In *The Misunderstood Economy* Eisner is at his best when he debunks the conventional economic analysis of debt, deficits, and unemployment that rationalizes government inaction. But when it comes to trade policy Eisner endorses orthodox free-trade views. That his views on trade are inconsistent with his belief in an activist government is a point I will return to.

"Almost everybody talks about budget deficits," says Eisner, and "almost everybody seems in principle to be against them." The problem is that "almost no one, literally, knows what he is talking about." Eisner's argument on the debt and deficit can be summarized as follows:

The deficit is smaller than the official numbers indicate. The federal budget does not distinguish between current operating outlays and capital expenditures. Those parts of the federal budget that represent investments that are paid out over many years—bridges, highways, dams—should be only partially included in the current budget, as is the accounting custom in the private sector. A second subtraction could be made for state and local government surpluses. According to Eisner, these two items alone reduce the deficit by almost 60 percent. In addition, the real value of the federal debt is reduced over time because of inflation.

The debt is not a burden on our grandchildren. The vast majority of the interest we pay on the national debt can be counted as an asset held by the American people, who own the bulk of treasury bills, notes, and bonds that constitute the debt. If the debt were ever paid off, the generation that did so would be the same generation to receive the benefits. But there is no reason why the federal debt cannot continue to be rolled over and to grow, as long as the nation's income is growing.

By historical or international comparisons our deficit is not large. Of the seven largest economies, the one with the smallest budget deficit (as a share of 1994 GNP) is the United States. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), America's budget deficit will fall to 2.7 percent of GDP this year, from a peak of 4.5 percent in 1992, and narrow further to 2.1 percent next year. By comparison, Japan's deficit is expected to be about 3 percent of GDP and Germany's around 4 percent.

Reducing the deficit will not spur economic growth. As long as there is slack in the economy, deficit spending can increase output, raise employment, and provide a sensible way of financing capital undertakings. Cutting spending and/or raising taxes reduces aggregate demand, slows the economy, lowers savings, depresses investment, and leads to fewer jobs. This only makes the deficit worse. The Congressional Budget Office estimates that each percentage point of unemployment adds $50 billion to the deficit.

Eisner argues that our economy needs more public investment—which has fallen to a postwar low—financed substantially by debt. In a slow-growth economy, public investment puts people to work and is a necessary complement to private-sector productivity growth. He concludes that

> present deficits are not too large. They can, should, and probably will be brought down as we reduce unemployment, speed economic growth, and achieve a prosperous economy.
> Real structural deficits have helped and not hurt output, employment, consumption, and well-being in the present. They have also entailed more, not less investment in our future.

The greatest misconception of modern economics, according to Eisner, is the doctrine of the natural rate of unemployment. (Perhaps to obscure the implications of this doctrine somebody came up with the name Non-accelerating-Inflation-Rate of Unemployment, or NAIRU.) The theory states that if unemployment falls below the "natural rate," inflation will rise and continually accelerate.

The theory assumes that inflation is the worst economic misfortune and that in order to avoid

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it we must prevent several million people from having jobs. Even if millions of workers are fully qualified and fully motivated they would still be unemployable. Further, it implies (the "natural" rate) that there is something fixed, immutable, and irreversible about such joblessness. Better to tolerate millions of unemployed than to tinker with nature.

If the "natural rate" were judged to be at something like 1 or 2 percent of the labor force the idea would not be particularly bothersome. But the "natural rate" has increased substantially over the past thirty years. During the Kennedy administration the official goal of public policy was to achieve 3 percent unemployment. By the late 1960s the aim was defined as 4 percent unemployment; in the late 1970s many economists defined 6 or even 7 percent unemployment as full employment.

A number of economists believe we are already at or near full employment. Speaking to the *New York Times* of the 8.5 million officially unemployed, Allen Meltzer, an economist at Carnegie Mellon Institute, undoubtedly tenured, states, "They are really all people between jobs. We need this pool to meet the normal demands of the labor market." One admires both his compassion and naïveté.

It has long been recognized that at very low rates of unemployment increasing aggregate demand will result in higher prices rather than lower unemployment. But to define at what level of unemployment that occurs is very difficult. As Eisner puts it:

> Can I guarantee that measures—short of war—to reduce unemployment to 3.4 percent will not increase the rate of inflation? No! Can anyone be sure it *will* increase inflation, let alone by how much or that the inflation will continue accelerating? I daresay no.

Where, Eisner asks, is the evidence that fiscal or monetary stimulus directed at reducing unemployment has caused accelerating inflation? Most of the inflation of the postwar period has come from supply shocks—chiefly the great increase in oil prices in the 1970s and early 1980s.

> For years we were told that efforts to reduce unemployment below a NAIRU of variously 6.5 and 7 percent would either (1) do no good or (2) cause accelerating inflation. Then in 1988, 1989, and 1990, unemployment averaged successively 5.4 percent, 5.2 percent, and 5.4 percent. . . . Inflation . . . went from 3.9 percent in 1988 to 4.4 percent in 1990, and then to 3.9 percent in 1991. I eagerly await the econometric estimates of accelerating inflation that can come out those figures.

When Eisner discusses domestic economic policy he is relentless in his criticism of economists who do not base their theories on fact and logic. Yet listen to Eisner on trade:

> The law of comparative advantage rigorously demonstrates that trade is a two way street, the gains from which are in no way impeded by differences in wages or productivity. It makes clear that a nation with an absolute advantage in the production of all goods should not produce all goods. It should rather specialize in those goods in which it has the greatest absolute advantage, the comparative advantage.

This is simply not the way the world works. Eisner's uncritical acceptance of the mainstream view of trade is the weakest part of his book. Global trade flows are not the result of classic laws of comparative advantage: most nations, by pursuing policies that benefit their own industries, *create* comparative advantage. Government is inextricably involved in the modern economy: subsidies to an exporter, public infrastructure investments, or government research assistance—policies likely to be supported by Eisner—are as much an interference with free trade as a tariff or quota. Free trade in the textbook sense does not and can not exist.

The world economy is in a downward cycle of slow growth, high interest rates and depressed purchasing power. Countries compete by keeping the cost of production low. Low wages, deregulation, and tax cuts are seen as the keys to national prosperity. Poor countries that refuse to follow these policies lose their access to capital; rich ones suffer capital flight.

National governments have difficulty providing for full employment and growing living standards because the international economy undercuts the capacity of govern-

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ments to control their economies. It is hard to see how Eisner's domestic Keynesian strategy can work without an increase in global demand. The challenge is to construct a global trading system that will gear the world toward high growth and full employment. Such a framework requires a global Keynesianism—including international regulations and standards in such areas as labor rights and the environment—that goes well beyond free trade.

Fear of deficits and silly talk about natural rates of unemployment have contributed to a state of national amnesia. The country appears to be forgetting the most important lesson we learned from John Maynard Keynes and World War II: that who is employable depends strictly on how badly employers need workers. In World War II hordes of young, old, female, black, unskilled, and hard-core unemployed persons previously dismissed as unemployable became cherished contributors to the war effort. Eisner believes we can have a civilian equivalent of World War II. There is no shortage of work that needs to be done.

When Keynes visited the United States in 1932 he lashed out at the timid way statesmen and economists were responding to the depression. "It is almost inconceivable," he said, "what rubbish a public man has to utter today if he is to keep respectable." Robert Eisner does not crave respectability. Somewhere Keynes is smiling. □

George Packer

THE NOVEL, THE MOB, AND MORRISON

I set out recently to read the complete novels of Toni Morrison with a mix of expectation and resentment that was probably unavoidable. What Lawrence called the "mob-self" had heard the tremendous chorus of celebration, crescendoing in the Nobel Prize. There is no writer on the contemporary American scene who comes as close as she to unanimity of approval, and in Morrison's case the approval has become a sort of personal devotion that serious writers are rarely the objects of (the *New York Times*, which isn't prone to lose its head, reported her Nobel lecture as an experience of rapture and transformation). Five years before, when a group of writers fired off a letter to the Pulitzer judges demanding that they not stiff *Beloved* as the National Book Award had done, the novel became a candidate for public office with angry, long-disenfranchised constituents doing the canvassing. The late Ralph Ellison refused to sign on, saying that Morrison didn't need their help to get her Pulitzer. His response implied that literature belongs mainly to individuals' private judgments, that it has little to do with consensus, and that the mob reaction is bound to corrupt it.

Books Discussed in this Essay

Beloved (Knopf, paper).

The Bluest Eye (Washington Square Press).

Jazz (Plume, paper).

Song of Solomon (Plume, paper).

Sula (Plume, paper).

Tar Baby (Plume, paper).

So the mob self approaches her work feeling bound to be not just impressed but overwhelmed, and of course the individual self folds his arms and refuses. The one dutifully longs to join the choir and is terrified of singing solo; the other makes up his mind not to be awed, and confirms the power of mob thinking by reaction. What seems impossible is to sit down to read Morrison free of prejudice. Her star has risen in a period when two cultural trends have taken place. A large amount of work by Americans whose collective voices were stifled or ignored throughout our history has appeared, which is a very good thing; and this upsurge has been accompanied by a reluctance to criticize on the part of well-intentioned people, which is a bad thing made worse by the difficulty of even pointing it out.

In theory, the first trend ought to be independent of the second: one can celebrate a collective freeing of talent and energy without suspending the ability or will to judge it. But in practice this seldom happens, for before the

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individual self can speak, the mob self intrudes with a long list of warnings and demands. Under pressure the sensitive and liberal mind, with its unshakeable bad conscience, tends to hesitate, second-guess, mute, glide over, skirt around, before emerging from these private adjustments with a presentable public opinion. The process is natural and in some ways justifiable. If you are white and male, honesty requires that you ask yourself some unpleasant questions: do I resent having the limelight on groups I can't take out membership in? Are my judgments bruised by the sense of being not just under attack, but worse, passé, used up, left out? Do I, as the cliché goes, really even get it, given the limits of perception imposed by my group affiliations? But somehow asking these questions resolves nothing, for as soon as you begin your true feelings recede further until they are all but irrecoverable.

These habits of mind have been widespread for a decade or so. And in this atmosphere of timidity, evasion, and consensus, Toni Morrison has become perhaps the country's leading writer. To assume that the coincidence of career and Zeitgeist has worked entirely in her favor is to miss what can be insidious and undermining about the relation between the two. It's also to do Morrison an injustice, because, *pace* Stanley Crouch, she is not just a "literary conjure woman"; she's a gifted novelist even though a posse of letter-signers said she is. Anyone who reads through all her work knows that it is not in hock to cultural fashion. But being an icon of a movement has its disadvantages, and in Toni Morrison's case it may have brought out weaknesses that would have remained dormant had she simply been a good writer producing a novel every four years or so.

Long stretches of the novels show what a first-rate storyteller Morrison has always been: the later sections of her first novel, *The Bluest Eye* (1970), which recount the tortured histories of Cholly Breedlove, Pauline, and Soaphead, who together contrive to destroy young Pecola; the first third of *Sula* (1973), which introduces the black neighborhood of Medallion, Ohio, in the early century and populates it with two families and an odd collection of extras; the first half of *Beloved* (1987), in which Sethe's slave past, her crossing to freedom, and her terrible decision to kill her child are interwoven with her fragile new life with Paul D; and above all the whole of *Song of Solomon* (1977), the high-spirited, terrifically inventive story of Milkman Dead's search for identity and history. In *Song of Solomon* Morrison sustains her narrative strengths until the very last pages—rapid, witty, epigrammatic dialogue; straightforward descriptive passages; a plot that keeps taking improbable yet irresistible turns; and a grasp of generational lineage that explains the complexity of the living in terms of the dead.

Taken together, these examples suggest a surprising generalization: she is at her best when she is writing about men. This isn't always true: in *Tar Baby* (1981), her weakest novel, the sections told from Joe's point of view are even more predictable than Jadine's, and in *Beloved* the surviving daughter, Denver, is probably the novel's most fully realized character. But in general her men—Breedlove and Soaphead in *The Bluest Eye*; Milkman Dead, his father Macon, and his friend, Guitar, in *Song of Solomon*: Paul D and Stamp Paid in *Beloved*—live on the page more persuasively than her women. And a related generalization: her minor characters—parents, townspeople, and others—often have more life than her protagonists. All of which suggests that her best writing is released by characters who don't represent herself. The pace is swifter, the action more compelling, the tone more matter-of-fact, the language plainer and yet more vivid. Morrison's eye is on the story itself and the sheer pleasure of storytelling overrides everything else.

Here, for example, is her portrait of Soaphead, the perverted healer to whom Pecola goes with her request for blue eyes:

> His cravings, although intense, never relished physical contact. He abhorred flesh on flesh. Body odor, breath odor, overwhelmed him. The sight of dried matter in the corner of the eye, decayed or missing teeth, ear wax, blackheads, moles, blisters, skin crusts—all the natural

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> excretions and protections the body was capable of—disquieted him. His attentions therefore gradually settled on those humans whose bodies were least offensive—children. And since he was too diffident to confront homosexuality, and since little boys were insulting, scary, and stubborn, he further limited his interests to little girls. They were usually manageable and frequently seductive. His sexuality was anything but lewd; his patronage of little girls smacked of innocence and was associated in his mind with cleanliness. He was what one might call a very clean old man.

Morrison's distance on this pedophile allows her a degree of pity, irony, and sharp insight. Compare that description of repressed emotion with this from her most recent novel, *Jazz* (1992):

> This notion of rest, it's attractive to her, but I don't think she would like it. They are all like that, these women. Waiting for the ease, the space that need not be filled with anything other than the drift of their own thoughts. But they wouldn't like it. They are busy and thinking of ways to be busier because such a space of nothing pressing to do would knock them down. No fields of cowslips will rush into that opening, nor mornings free of flies and heat when the light is shy. No. Not at all. They fill their mind and hands with soap and repair and dicey confrontations because what is waiting for them, in a suddenly idle moment, is the seep of rage. Molten. Thick and slow-moving. Mindful and particular about what in its path it chooses to bury.

The difference between these two passages is partly explained by their positions at opposite ends of her career, two decades apart. In as much as they represent tendencies in her writing, they show her becoming more lyrical, less precise, less straightforward, more pumped up. Persuasion gives way to assertion. The second passage sounds more "literary," with its manipulations of rhythm and syntax, but it wills effects that the language interferes with. Emotion and imagery that arise in the first passage from the material itself are breathed mouth to mouth into the second, so that the power of authorial lungs rather than character and incident becomes the focus. In the second passage character itself has dissolved into a generic female rage, whereas the preferences and disgusts of Soaphead in *The Bluest Eye* are his alone. On the book jackets critics tout this tendency away from individuality as a token of strength, the mark of a major writer: "One accepts the characters of *Jazz* as generalized figures moving rhythmically in the narrator's mind," says the *New York Times; Tar Baby*, says *New York* magazine, "transform[s] individuals into forces, idiosyncrasy into inevitability."

The tendency is perceptible in all her work, starting with *The Bluest Eye*'s self-conscious first-person sections and its failed experiments with right-margin justification and Dick-and-Jane headings. But in the later books the trend toward both extreme inwardness and mob consciousness becomes dominant—a high-octane lyricism that insists on powering one woman's emotion with transpersonal resonance. Prose-poems, one-sentence paragraphs, folk-talk, elaborate metaphor: in the latter part of *Beloved* and throughout *Jazz* every line quivers under the burden of these demands. Without simple, direct statement the stories are difficult to get through, and for extended periods there is no story at all.

The conflict between powerful but conventional gifts and an ambition to wring them into something more exalted appears most vividly in *Song of Solomon*, her best novel and the one that made her famous. Its hero, Milkman Dead, is a sour, careless young man who begins an inadvertent but increasingly obsessive uncovering of his history. It takes him from his prosperous, unhappy family life in a midwestern town to the back roads of Virginia and deeper into the past, from bizarre names to the equally bizarre stories that explain them, from legend and riddle to truth, until he arrives in a hot, empty place where everyone seems to have the same name: Solomon. It's the name of Milkman's great-grandfather, who, he learns, was "a flying African. . . . Some of those Africans they brought over here as slaves could fly. A lot of them flew back to Africa." One day, Solomon took flight, leaving behind Milkman's grandfather and twenty other children to contend with the pains and liberations of life on American ground. But the notion of his great-grandfather's winged escape is thrill-

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ing to Milkman. It frees him to reconcile with his family, take pride in his lineage, learn the meaning of love, defy his murderous, race-enraged friend Guitar, and emulate his forefather on an outcropping of rock called Solomon's Leap.

Whether it goes under the rubric of folklore or magical realism, an ending in which men actually fly is the book's first wrong move. This bit of deus ex machina reveals nothing about either Milkman or the tangled line of black history in America or "what all human relationships boiled down to." It provides a shiver of mythmaking and a surprise solution to Milkman's ambivalence toward family and love: a solution that comes not out of the characters' lives on the page but out of the author's hat. Almost visibly the novel falters on its last step, loses faith in a quieter, more personal recognition, and begins very rapidly beating its wings. It's as though Morrison stopped trusting the more ordinary narrative talents to endow her novels with the weight and scope she wanted for them. And given the collective expectations borne on her career, her role as epic poet and public inspiration, it would be difficult for anyone not to become impatient.

Beyond this point the matter turns on judgments. One reader's gimmick is another's genius. Some readers will be breathtaken by flying Africans; and some will be overwhelmed by the ghost's musings in *Beloved* ("I am Beloved and she is mine. I see her take flowers away from leaves she puts them in a round basket the leaves are not for her she fills the basket."). If I find these manipulative and overwrought instead of dazzling and rhapsodic, it betrays my preference for a more natural, less self-conscious prose, for emotion that is won instead of willed, and for fiction in which characters' destinies are worked out through motive and incident instead of supernatural intervention. Does it also betray a deficiency that is ultimately attributable to factors like race and sex? That question, born in English departments and now widespread, valid but stifling, leads back to the ones I raised earlier, to which the only real answer is: maybe. But having examined oneself honestly and faced the possibility of bias or blindness and tried not to be ruled by them, one is left with the judgment of the individual self. However limited and flawed, we need it if we are to keep our various mob selves from doing our reading for us. □

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Organize!

Editors:

I was amazed, and then amused, and then depressed to read the ten responses in the "Left After Forty Years" symposium (*Dissent*, Winter 1994) and find that only one respondent--Cornel West—actually named any organizations. I know that politics these days is more about "discourse" (although I confess to not actually knowing what that means) than about organizing, but this is too much. There are lots of ways for left intellectuals to relate to and support the day-to-day organizing of progressive groups—including helping them with writing, theorizing, outreach, speaking, recruiting students, international connections, research, fundraising and more, still leaving time (and perhaps renewed energy) for valuable scholarship.

It has taken a long time for the left to become as weak as it is, and it's going to take a long time to develop some real strength. We need some new thinking *and* new language, right alongside powerful popular organizations. *Dissent*, as a reliably sane voice, could help out along the way with both.

In that spirit, then, here are the names and addresses of the three groups (I work for #2) mentioned by West: (1) Democratic Socialists of America, 180 Varick Street, 12th floor, NYC 10014 (212-727-8610); (2) New Party, 227 West 40th, #1303, NYC 10018 (212-302-5053); and (3) Industrial Areas Foundation, 1106 Clayton Lane, Austin, Texas 78723. A little time and money invested in these groups would not be a bad way for *Dissent*ers to fulfill one piece of their obligation to the struggle for democracy and freedom.

DANIEL CANTOR
New York, N.Y. □

Unfair to Sklar

Editors:

As graduate students at Northern Illinois University during the 1970s, we worked with Martin J. Sklar and Carl Parrini and came to think of ourselves as "second generation" students of William A. Williams. We therefore read the review of Henry Berger's new Williams reader with great interest. It provides a welcome appreciation of Williams's insights and suggests their enduring relevance.

We write because we were puzzled by the reviewers' characterization of Martin J. Sklar's approach. Paul Buhle and Edward Rice-Maximin suggest that from his work with Williams at Wisconsin Sklar developed a "corporatist" interpretation of twentieth-century American history. We think this claim is mistaken because Sklar has long drawn a sharp distinction between corporatist ideology and corporate liberalism. Moreover, as we understand the issue, corporatist ideology—particularly as it arose in Europe and Latin America—was strongly statist and had traditionalist and romantically organicist elements. Corporate liberalism, however, has encompassed a commitment to individualism, voluntary association, and the supremacy of society over the state—what the Founders called the sovereignty of the people. In addition, although some have interpreted corporate liberalism as simply the invention of "elite" corporate capitalists, Sklar's work has led us to understand that it was a cross-class construction developed over time by large and small capitalists, labor leaders, social reformers, and politicians.

The conflation of corporatism and corporate liberalism may have begun with Williams himself, who proposed that with the rise of corporate capitalism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, intellectuals and policymakers developed a "syndicalist" definition of society, through which functional groups supplanted individuals as the fundamental category of political discourse and obligation. Some of those present at the creation of the Wisconsin school of diplomatic history in the 1950s and 1960s—for example, Ellis Hawley and Thomas McCormick—have analyzed twentieth-century U.S. history in terms of this syndicalist definition and have developed what may be legitimately called a corporatist interpretation of U.S. political and diplomatic history. Although Williams's "syndicalism" is compatible with either a corporatist liberal or a corporatist interpretation, the two must be distinguished.

This is more than an academic issue. In addition to mischaracterizing Sklar's extraordinarily important work, confusing corporatism and corporate liberalism obscures crucial differences between European, Latin American, and U.S. political traditions to which we need to attend in developing a strategy for the left in this country.

William Burr, WASHINGTON, D.C.; Keith Haynes, ALBANY, N.Y.; James Livingston, NEW BRUNSWICK, N.J.; Lawrence Lynn, SILVER SPRING, MD.; Richard Schneirov, TERRE HAUTE, IND.; and Paul Wolman, WASHINGTON, D.C.

Paul Buhle Replies:

The authors of the review had no intention of questioning the originality or value of Martin Sklar's contribution. A review is necessarily shorthand, and we hope our critics will be pleased by the full treatment of corporate theory in our biography of William Appleman Williams, scheduled to appear in Spring 1995.

Speaking for myself, however, I would like to propose a

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helpful third term: Trumanism. When another quarter-century has passed and Stalinism is only an unhappy memory, Trumanism will (unless something better happens) be the dominant legacy of the twentieth century to a toxified, ozone-thinned, automobile-overwhelmed globe. At the cusp of mid-century, Harry Truman used the cold war pretext to erect a warfare/welfare economy and security state so comprehensive in its handouts and its exclusions that liberals and conservatives alike soon tied their political careers to it. More to the point for socialists of that day, he successfully eclipsed the class struggle by accelerating a whites-only suburban sprawl and upward mobility, destroying the cities as nonwhites entered in numbers (also creating a bastion of future blue-collar conservatism in the South and West, and arranging for an armed, forced integration that would make nonwhites the frontline cannon fodder for future imperial wars).

The lamentably forgotten Lewis Corey, in a 1950 review of *The Vital Center* in the *Progressive*, commented that beyond anticommunism and "growth," the liberals behind Truman had no real ideas at all. That symptomizes the real tragedy behind the decline of democratic hopes and environmental prospects since the New Deal, and brackets any theorizing about modern "corporatism." Beneath the endless policy rhetoric and finger wagging from Clintonia to Limbaughland, we face a moral nihilism a thousand times deeper and more destructive than the much discussed nihilism of the ghettos. As I look out at my little Rhode Island, a picturesque green space and historic home of manufacture was turned into a condo-suburban zone ofswollen bureaucracies, handouts to business, dying songbirds, and sick people (the second-highest cancer death rate in the U.S.) in only two generations. That's Trumanism to the core. □

postmodern icons explained

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The Last Page

DISSENT has recently acquired a fax machine—not, to be sure, the very latest model, the cast-off of one of our editors who is "upgrading," but a new machine for us nonetheless. Will this make us more efficient? Maybe so, and maybe also a little more up-to-date in our coverage of unfolding events. But I suspect that all our writers, even when they are writing about events that unfolded long ago, will simply wait a little longer before sending in their articles. There will be the same rush at the end of each quarter or, more likely, a greater rush, since the "end" will be foreshortened; articles will have to be turned around at a much faster rate.

That is certainly my own experience with the fax. The old leisurely pace of what we used to call "correspondence" has been transformed into rapid-fire communication. The new message on its curling paper (the curl is already gone, but it seemed to me nicely symbolic of the disappearing word) demands a quick answer. One has a sense of the sender waiting nervously next to the machine, fingers tapping. Often when I don't respond immediately, I get a phone call: Didn't you get my fax?

Of course I did; I just need a minute or two, or maybe a month, to think things over. But the whole point of the machine is to deny me that interval, to "save" my time. And then the messages multiply to fill the time that's been saved—just as drivers and cars appear out of nowhere to clog a new highway.

The multiplication of messages has been going on for years now, but the combination of Xerox, fax, e-mail, voice messaging, and mobile phones breaks down all the barriers. There is no room left for evasion or escape; I can't even forget a message, since my memory is mechanically prodded at regular intervals. I am besieged with information, data, advice, requests, solicitations, gossip, arguments, invitations—all urgent, all requiring that I focus on them immediately and get back to the senders ASAP. It is as if I am on a communications assembly line that is moving faster and faster. Isn't this what we used to call the "speed-up"? Isn't it a form of exploitation—though for whose benefit? In any case, I have an instinctive trade-union response: slow down.

Does any one really believe that the quality of life of the professional classes has been improved by all these machines? Or of the business classes? Or of the myriads of clerks and secretaries who actually "interface" with the new technology? (Maybe this last group will soon disappear, along with the time they once occupied. Soon, I am told, all phone calls in the United States will be answered by the same mechanical, possibly female, person, an incredible labor saving device. But the six or sixteen options she or it offers require long thought, and the ensuing backup is sure to produce more jobs, of a less-and-less human sort: Can you deal with my machines?)

The machines are fun in the beginning, toys for grownups, though it is only our kids who will ever master them. And it probably makes some people feel important to be besieged with messages—the way a city besieged by soldiers is suddenly the key to military victory or defeat. But the fun will become routine and the routine more and more exhausting. And the importance will fade once everyone is similarly besieged. Imagine the men and women of the future with mobile phones and hand-sized fax machines in their pockets and a wrist watch p.c. for their e-mail: never a moment alone. When that happens, I'm calling for a General Strike.

MICHAEL WALZER □

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